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Edited by
Felix Wilfred

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A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

People's Space: Civil Society Today

Edited by

Felix Wilfred

Jeevadhara

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EDITORIAL

Civil society occupies today a central place in the life of a nation. It is a category with a long history behind it. In recent times, however, civil society has acquired great prominence as it has become a space of contestation by diverse forces. Foremost in the competition is the market. Then, there are fundamentalist forces like the Hindutva that want to occupy the entire space of civil society. They are all out to appropriate it to promote vested interest, sidelining, if not eliminating, other interlocutors. The challenge today is to turn the civil society into really a people's space and an agency of social transformation. Herein we realize the importance of various social movements and initiatives of people's participation. It is the active participation of these innovative and creative forces in the arena of the civil society that can strengthen the democratic process and stem the tide of vested interests from appropriating it.

"People's Space: Civil Society Today" has, then, a programmatic tone. It is not so much the actuality as the goal towards which we need to move; it is the call to transform the civil society into what it should really be—a space where people of divergent backgrounds, distinct communities with divergent interests and choices meet and interact and negotiate their relationships. It is the space where the submerged voices of the marginalized should resound with new vigour.

Ananta Kumar Giri with his characteristic theoretical rigour presents us an overview of the problematic of the civil society exploring its various aspects. The thought provoking contribution of Jagabandhu Acharya leads us to critical reflection on the cooption of the civil society by the market and the state, and its exploitation by the middle class. For the civil society to be steered to the cause of the poor, it should take into account the differentiation of caste, class and other forms of stratification, and should be related to "the basic problematic of legitimacy, accountability and representation of people's interests".

The article by M. Amaladoss makes a concise presentation of the issue of civil society and religion and argues for continuous dialogue for conflict-resolution and for overcoming the many hurdles of mutual

relationships. Moving beyond the prevailing approaches, he underlines the importance of religions entering into dialogue among themselves as constituents of the civil society. Sampathkumar with his scholarship of Christian Scriptures and the ancient Greek world takes up the case of the confrontation of Maccabees with Hellenistic rulers and shows that the victory over the hegemonic cultural and political force of Hellenism led, interestingly, also to a radical rethinking and transformation of the Jewish religion itself.

My concluding article, taking a critical view of the attempts of Hindutva to appropriate the space of civil society, calls upon the Christian community to be an active interlocutor in it. A mere religious confrontation, specially in the light of recent incidents of attack on Christians, may be short-sighted and can only help the fundamentalist forces to divert attention from basic issues affecting the people, specially the poor segments. The article in this context shows the imperative need for the Christian community to enter into the larger arena of civil society, the conditions for it, and the issues with which it should be concerned, and concludes with some proposals.

It is hoped that these reflections will contribute to the clarification of the issue of civil society that has great potential to bring greater democratization, cohesion and understanding among the various groups subsumed under the polity, and to expand the space of freedom and the commitment to social equity.

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Felix Wilfred

The Calling of a Creative Civil Society¹

Ananta Kumar Giri²

In this contribution written with great theoretical rigour and drawing from most significant authors, Ananta Giri presents an overview of the contemporary debate on civil society. He underlines the importance of the autonomy of civil society both from the state and the market which tend to appropriate in their own image this public space. The writer tells us about the inadequacy of a mere rational and discursive approach to civil society and impresses upon us the crucial importance of developing moral and ethical perspectives as foundations for a creative civil society. In the same vein, he focuses attention on listening (rather than simply speaking), self-sacrifice, martyrdom, etc for the revitalization of civil society today.

Much of the recent focus on NGOs and civil society can be attributed to the encounter of many in Western Europe with the cultural experience of organizations such as Solidarity in Poland and charter 77 in the former Czechoslovakia. Prior to the downfall of Soviet communist hegemony, these organizations were used by courageous dissidents to attempt to create a free space where they could live as citizens according to their own norms and values. Essentially what they did was to try to maintain a civil society in the shadow of a totalitarian state. It became clear to many in the western nations watching their difficult struggles that the existence and autonomy of this third sector, the civil society, is

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1. This paper builds on my earlier working paper, "Rethinking Civil Society," and I am grateful to Professors T.K. Oommen, M.N. Panini, Amitav Dasgupta, C.T. Kurien and Felix Wilfred for their comments and criticism who however are not responsible for the views expressed here.
 2. Ananta Kumar Giri is on the faculty of the Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai and is the author of *Global Transformations: Postmodernity and Beyond; Values, Ethics and Business: Challenges for Education and Management*, both published from Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

a vitally important element in the creation and maintenance of a democratic society. (Steven M. Borish³)

A contemporary critique of capitalism is perhaps more needed than ever as the demise of state socialism has increased capitalism's self-assertion. Today there is scarcely anyone who wants to criticize capitalism. And yet in the European Union alone we have seventeen million unemployed... We have to imagine something new in order to criticize this system. But the standard of criticism can only be the realization of a radical democracy, which naturally involves taming capitalism by means of a social state to a degree yet unknown. (Jurgen Habermas⁴)

The Problem

Civil Society today is a globally valorized discourse which is part of the trinity of the globalising discursive field constituted of two other elements: market and democracy. The contemporary valorization of civil society makes it an ally of the market, the liberated and liberalized non-state public sphere where there exists rule of law, so that people can exercise their "freedom of choice." Thus propagation of civil society through the package of market capitalism such as the World Bank today are also the votaries of civil society. They are vocal in their disenchantment with State and turn to the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) as actors of civil society for service-delivery and other functions. But the contemporary reduction of civil society to the space of market exchange needs to be interrogated especially as such a reduction is part of the contemporary valorization of capital which gives primacy to profit over human need, intimacy and the inter-subjective foundations of a dignified society. In this context, civil society needs to be rethought as a terrain of political mobilization and socio-political revolution for realizing human freedom and a dignified social order which gives an appropriate institutional form to market but is not governed by it.

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3. Steven M. Borish, *Danish Social Movements in a Time of Global Destabilization* (Denmark: Center for Research on Life Enlightenment and Cultural Identity, 1996), p. 54.
 4. Jurgen Habermas, "Overcoming the Past: Conversations with Adam Michnik", *New Left Review* 203, 1994, P. 11.

Though not much work has been done in the public sphere and at the popular level either in the West or in India to dispel the popular perception and the hegemonic propagation of the reduction of civil society to a sphere of free market exchange, scholars in the academy have worked hard to dispel such a misconception. In the Indian context, the work of Neera Chandhoke⁵ is a remarkable example of such an endeavour, Chandhoke, building on three centuries of political interpretation of the idea of civil society, not only provides a strong political interpretation of the project of civil society but also urges us to realize its revolutionary aspirations. Chandhoke's is a welcome counter to the marketization of the market view of civil society and even to the reconstructive agenda of civil society of advocates such as Jurgen Habermas⁶, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato⁷ for whom the project of civil society today is destined to be reformist and it cannot go beyond constitutionalism. But the turn to the political in the project of civil society, though a welcome move and has behind it three centuries of discursive deliberations, socio-political movements and constitutional state-making, is not adequate for realising the possibilities of civil society as a space of and for self-realization, intersubjective intimacy and creativity, and critique of the logic of the market and the state.

In fact, the problem with the idea of civil society is that it is too much determined by the modernist view of power and politics and this over-determination of the political in the constitution of the discourse and practice of civil society needs as much a foundational interrogation as its reduction to market exchange, or even to the Hegelian "system of needs". Though at the surface level, the project of civil society looks as if it is a project of non-politics and outside the sphere of state, in its deep structure it is guided by the same logic of power which constitutes the realm of politics in the state. In this context the challenge before us is to rethink civil society and transcend the primacy of the political in thinking about it and being part of it. Those who inhabit civil society are not only rights-

5. Neera Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory* (Delhi: Sage, 1995)

6. Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions Towards a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

7. Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992)

bearing, juridical beings but also spiritually integral beings, and unless civil society is animated and enriched by their *sadhana* of self-transformation and the *tapasya* of unconditional ethical obligation of the self to the other and society, then it cannot perform its creative and critical functions. It shall cease to be a reflective space where the logic of money and power of society is shown its proper place and is given a transformative direction.

The Idea of Civil Society

But as a prelude to this rethinking, interrogation, and dialogue it is helpful to have some clarity on the idea of civil society and the historical context of its contemporary revival. The idea of civil society has a long history. Though many would like to confine it within modern western thought, it can be traced far back both within the western tradition and outside it. For example, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato in their comprehensive treatise on civil society — the history of this idea, its various critiques as well as contemporary articulations—tell us that in the western context, it can be traced as far back to Aristotle. They write: “The first version of the concept of civil society appear in Aristotle under the heading of political society/community.”⁸ But this idea of political community was different from the modernist idea of politics and political society. “*Political Koinonia* was defined as a public-ethical community of free and equal citizens under a legally defined system of rules. Law itself, however, was seen as the expression of an ethics, a common set of norms and values defining not only political procedures but also a substantive form of life based on a developed catalogue of preferred virtues and forms of interaction.”⁹

As we can note, this idea of civil society concerned with virtues and substantive goodness is different from the modernist idea of civil society as the space of mediation between family and state, individual and state which did not pay enough attention to cultivation of virtues in the life of individuals. On the other hand, any talk of virtue in the modernist discourse gets immediately associated either with collectivist assumptions or with heroic politics. In this context, the Aristotelian focus on virtue not only as an idiosyncratic attribute of the individual but also as a seeker “of a single objective

8. Cohen & Arato (op. cit., 1992), p. 84.

9. Ibid.

account of the human good, of human flourishing"¹⁰ can revitalize the modernist account of civil society.

The idea of civil society in modernity whose master interlocutor is G.W.F. Hegel has many critiques as well: from Hannah Arendt to Michael Foucault. We shall encounter tangentially some of these enunciations and critiques in the course of our following dialogue and exploration. But now let us straightaway go to some of the definitions of civil society.

By civil society Cohen and Arato refer to "a normative model of a societal realm different from the state and the economy and having the following components: (1) Plurality: families, informal groups, and voluntary associations whose plurality and autonomy allow for a variety of forms of life; (2) Publicity: institutions of culture and communications; (3) Privacy: a domain of individual self-development and moral choice; and (4) Legality: structures of general laws and basic rights needed to demarcate plurality, privacy, and publicity from at least the State and, tendentially, the economy."¹¹ This depiction of civil society is comprehensive and it draws our attention to its four important characteristics: *plurality*, *publicity*, *privacy* and *legality*.

But in the modernist construction of civil society, while the issues of publicity and legality have got enough attention, the issues of plurality and privacy, i.e., "self-development and moral choice" have neither received equally engaged reflection nor been accompanied by creative collective actions. Co-existence of varieties of forms of life requires mutual penetration between the self and other, but Euro-American culture and civil society is in a very fundamental sense deeply monological and it does not have the ontological resources to practise toleration as an ontological and intersubjective project rather than to talk on this discursively as a political project alone.

Coming back to having a clearer view of the meaning of civil society, Cohen and Arato tell us: "We postulate the differentiation of civil society not only from the State but also from the economy. Our concept is neither state-centered, as was Hegel's however ambiguously, not economy-centered, as was Marx's. Ours is a

10. Cf. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues," in Martha C. Nussbaum & Amartya Sen (eds.), *Quality of Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 243

11. Cohen & Arato (op. cit., 1992), p. 346

society-centered project."¹² So, the project of civil society is a societal project but what is the conception of society in this discourse? Society is a society of rights-bearing individuals. As Chandhoke helps us understand it: "In the eyes of the state and the law, the individual is the citizen, in the eyes of inhabitants of civil society he is recognizable as the bearer of rights. Rights flowing from the states of citizen, thus constitute the individual of civil society."¹³ But in rethinking civil society there is a need to move from the discourse of rights to a practice of obligation and thinking of society as a field of such obligations.

In coming to terms with civil society, another issue that is helpful to get clear about is the link between civil society and social movements. In fact, the contemporary revival of civil societies has much to do with social movements in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa, North America and Western Europe. But in talking about the project of civil society as it is constituted of voluntary associations and social movements, there is a need to make a distinction between those social movements which are absolutist and fundamentalist, i.e., those who close their doors to any dialogue and conversation and those who present themselves for dialogue and conversation.

The contemporary revival of civil society has arisen in new historical constellations of various social movements but these movements soon become preoccupied only with the issue of capture of power; they degenerate themselves into actors only of political society. Cohen and Arato tell us that this is, at least, the experience in Eastern Europe and Latin America. They urge us to reflect: "What will happen to the value of democracy as the sphere of civil society shrinks to the benefit of political society?"¹⁴ This shrinkage urges us to rethink and reconstruct civil society as a space of reflection, creativity, criticism and struggle in the contemporary context.

The reflective space of civil society must maintain its autonomy both from the incorporation of the state and market which are only too eager to capture it. But while civil society must maintain its autonomy, its reflective deliberations and preferences nevertheless must influence the actors of both the state and the market.

12. Cohen & Arato (op. cit., 1992), p. 411.

13. Chandhoke (op. cit., 1995), p. 183

14. Cohen & Arato (op. cit., 1992), p. 57

In fact, the reflective ground of civil society must also be the constitutive ground of both the market and the state. Thus the space that civil society occupies in a democratic society is not of the same order as that of market and state. While market and state can be looked at as the bounded sub-systems of a society, civil society does not occupy any bounded space as its ground and horizon of unbound reflection transgresses the boundaries between society and the market, and society and state. At the same time, while dealing with power in both state and market the reflective actors of civil society must be aware that they are dealing with two kinds of power. While the power of the state, especially its tyrannical form, is easily visible and can be targeted the power of the market is largely invisible and it presents itself with a sweet smile as the facilitator of actors' "freedom of choice", and this power calls for an ability within the actors to make a distinction between need and greed, illusion and bondage.¹⁵

Civil Society and the Over-Determination of the Political: a Dialogue

G.W.F. Hegel is the master interlocutor of the discourse of civil society in modernity who has left a profound legacy in the subsequent reflections on it in the last 150 years. His idea of civil society reflects both an instance of the over-determination of the political as well as a realization of the limits of politics inasmuch as he looks at civil society as a sphere of ethics. But as we shall see, by ethics Hegel does not mean only societal customs but refers to what Habermas¹⁶ later calls the "post-conventional" moral development of individuals. One aspect of the Hegelian discourse of civil society is that "civil society is the sphere of universal egoism, where I treat everybody as a means to my own ends."¹⁷ But it must be noted that "If Hegel's concept of civil society is a narrative of greed and egoism, his narrative of a desired civil society is one of how these limitations can be overcome."¹⁸ This could be overcome both by developing

15. I owe the arguments in this paragraph to the insights of Professor C.T. Kurien (personal communication).

16. Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999),

17. Chandhoke (op. cit., 1995), p. 94.

18. Ibid, p. 25.

belongingness to state as well as by developing one's own inner conscience and morality. Unfortunately, it is the statist dimension of Hegel's discourse of civil society which has dominated our thought and practice and his attentiveness to the development of inner conscience in overcoming one's egotism in civil society has not received much attention and is now in need of an epochal retrieval and re-articulation.

In recent Indian scholarship on civil society, Dipankar Gupta¹⁹ is an uncritical champion of the Hegelian agenda of state in thinking about civil society. He asserts that tradition is the store house of customs and customary laws which has no regard for human dignity and hence cannot and should not enter into the domain of civil society. But Gupta does not extend the spirit of his critique of tradition to the critique of modern state. Gupta does not realize that the logic of the modern state has led to the annihilation of human freedom as well.

In discussing the potential for formation of civil society that the social mobilisation of Bharatiya Kishan Union of Mahendra Singh Tikait of UP offers, Gupta has the following comments regarding its anti-liquor campaign: "When it comes to the laudable objective of curbing liquor and drug addiction, here too methods are traditional and repressive. Even if the government gives some one the legitimate contract to vend liquor, the outlet should be forcibly closed. In addition the person who rents his property for such purposes should also be socially boycotted."²⁰ But Gupta does not look into the repressive desire of the state in flooding UP villages with liquor and the ethical foundation of the so-called legitimate contract itself. Nor does he consider the calamities and destruction that liquor brings to families and individual lives.

Gupta looks at the emergence of civil society in terms of a transition from "objective to subjective epistemologies" but civil society is not only a question of epistemology, it requires an appropriate ontology as well. In the presentation of self in Gupta's public sphere of subjective epistemology, what is the scope for cultivation of an appropriate subjectivity? While talking about Mahendra Singh Tikait, Gupta writes the following, among others: "...many of his followers have told me that on several occasions the BKU

19. Dipankar Gupta, *Rivalry and Brotherhood: Politics in the Life of Farmers in Northern India* (Delhi: Oxford U. Press. 1997)

20. *Ibid*, p. 145

chief leaves a meeting and goes to his prayer room where he is not to be disturbed.”²¹ But Gupta does not ask Tikait what significance prayer has in his personal life as well as in his conduct in the public sphere. Tikait’s immersion in prayer in the midst of political meetings is an instance of the limits of the political and an epistemological approach to thinking about subjectivity and civil society and draws our attention to the issue of cultivation of self.

What is helpful is that Hegel himself does not make a sharp distinction between ethics and morality probably realizing that without moral courage and moral conscience, ethical life under even modern civil society and state can be customary, no different from the customary laws of tradition. In fact, ethical life is an ideal for Hegel which is not to be confused that it either exists in the modern civil society or the state. If this has not adequately developed in the sphere of family, as Gupta argues, it has also not adequately developed in the sphere of civil society as Hegel himself describes civil society as “the state of appearance” or as the “appearing world of ethical life.”²²

While many of the interpreters of civil society inevitably refer to the indomitable and indisputably significant Hegelian legacy, we may also take note of another tradition of thinking about civil society, i.e. the tradition of Scottish Enlightenment which is not so much concerned with state but with the development of individual moral conscience. In this tradition represented by Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith and others: “the idea of civil society came to rest on the notion of autonomous and moral individual as standing at the foundation of social order.”²³ What is important to realize is that morality in this tradition is not an appendage of society, even a civil society, and a Durkheimian collective conscience. As Seligman tells us about this tradition: “*While men are, in this reading, still social beings, what permits sociability is not the dissolution of self in any general will but the constitution of self through that higher morality imparted by the impartial, internal spectator*—higher than that is than the mere motive of recognition and approval on the part of ‘high society’. a motive that Smith was to view

21. Ibid, p. 60.

22. Fred R. Dallmayr, *G.W.F. Hegel: Modernity and Politics* (Sage, 1993), p. 122.

23. Adam Seligman, “Animadversions Upon Civil Society and Civic Virtue in the Last Decade of Twentieth Century,” in John A. Hall (ed.), *Civil Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 215

with increasing apprehension through the closing decades of the eighteenth century.”²⁴

The above urges us to appreciate the *significance of moral conscience for the formation of a creative civil society*. But the statist interpreters of Hegel have often forgotten this calling. But from this dialogue with statism in the Hegelian legacy on thinking about civil society, we can now come to a critique of the notion of the public and publicity in the Hegelian agenda. And here Hannah Arendt’s normative critique of civil society helps us in its rethinking. Arendt argues that civil society as an appendage of state and modern mass society has obstructed the “enrichment of the private sphere as a sphere of intimacy.”²⁵ But it is important to preserve and cultivate the sphere of intimacy in order that civil society does not degenerate into mass society.

In her critique of civil society, Arendt deploys a different notion of power. For her, power is “acting in concert, on the basis of making and keeping promises, mutually binding one another, covenanting.”²⁶ Her concept of power points to “action-oriented to normative principles that derive their force from the depth-structure of a form of communication based on mutual recognition and solidarity”²⁷ and she conceives of polis as “the organization of people as it arises out of speaking and acting together.”²⁸

Civil Society and the Play of Communicative Power: Habermas, Public Sphere and Beyond

Arendt’s foregrounding of intimacy and conception of power as “covenanting” is an important step in transcending the dominance of the political in rethinking civil society. Power here is not an instrument of domination but arises out of human conversation and mutual recognition. Such a notion of power can be a first step in transcending the primacy of political in the modernist discourse of civil society and Jurgen Habermas presents us such an agenda of rethinking and reconstruction. Habermas himself writes: “In contrast to Weber, who sees the fundamental phenomenon of power as the probability that in a social relationship one can assert one’s

24. Ibid, p. 209

25. Cohen & Arato (op. cit., 1992), p. 178

26. Ibid

27. Ibid, p. 179

28. Ibid, p. 178

own will against opposition, Arendt views power as the potential of a *common will* formed in non-coercive communication."²⁹ For Habermas, communicative power can develop "only in undeformed public spheres; it can issue only from structures of undamaged intersubjectivity found in non-distorted communication."³⁰

The idea of public sphere is central to Habermas's reconstruction of civil society but it is important to note that Habermas himself writes: "... within the boundaries of the public sphere, or at least of a liberal public sphere, *actors can acquire influence, not political power.*"³¹ Therefore actors in civil society have to learn how to speak to each other, persuade each other and gain the authority of influence through a process of deliberation and dialogue. Such moral influence can control "the public authority of the modern state"³² rather than becoming an appendage of state or an instrument in the capture of political power.

Habermas goes beyond a strict sociologism in his conception of public sphere which helps us to rethink civil society as well. The public sphere is not a social order, nor is it a social institution and "certainly not an organization"³³. "It is not even a framework of norms with differentiated competencies and roles, membership regulations and so on..." (ibid). It is a space for mutual conversation between actors where they constitute each other rather than just observe each other from the outside. In the evocative words of Habermas: "Unlike success-oriented actors who mutually observe each other as one observes something in the objective world, persons acting communicatively encounter each other in a *situation* they at the same time constitute with their co-operatively negotiated interpretations."³⁴

If Habermas does not reduce public sphere to social institution, he does not reduce it to the political public sphere either. In his discussion on the rise of public sphere in modern Europe, he has discussed, at great length, the rise of the literary public sphere.³⁵ Habermas urges us to understand the wider significance of it as

29. Habermas (op. cit., 1996), p. 147

30. Ibid, p. 148

31. Ibid, p. 371, emphases added.

32. Cohen & Arato (op. cit., 1992), p. 216

33. Habermas (op. cit., 1996), p. 341

34. Ibid, p. 361

35. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989).

literature transgresses the boundary between the public and private and urges us to realize that "problems voiced in the public sphere first become visible when they are mirrored in personal life experiences."³⁶ Furthermore, "To the extent these experiences find their concise expression in the languages of religion, art, and literature, the 'literary' public sphere in the broader sense, which is specialized for the articulation of values and world disclosure, is intertwined with the political public sphere."³⁷

The utopia of civil society, Habermas argues, is an utopia of differentiation as against the all-consuming agenda of market and society. But for Habermas as well as for Cohen and Arato, this utopia is anti-revolutionary as they believe that revolutions are no longer possible. It is civil disobedience, rather than revolution, which keeps "the utopian horizons of a democratic and just civil society alive."³⁸ But this is a limited programme of reconstruction which does not have the desire to radically interrogate the system itself. This is a reflection of what Manoranjan Mohanty³⁹ calls "acquiescent politics". We cannot for sure predict that any revolutionary re-arrangement of system would not take place. To a historically minded scholar such as Habermas one hardly needs to remind that history is full of surprises and these surprises may as well spring from the space of civil society and the public sphere.

Another problem with the Habermasian reconstruction of civil society is its uncritical bondage to a rational model of human life and his consistent refusal to broaden its agenda to a supra-rational and spiritual reconstruction of self, culture and society. For Habermas, "...a robust civil society can blossom only in an already rationalized life-world."⁴⁰ But the preparation of self that is required to take part in public sphere such as capacity for otherness, self-sacrifice, widening of self, devotion to collective well-being, and capacity for criticism and creativity both at the level of self and society is not ensured only by rationalization even under the aegis of what Habermas calls "communicative reason". It also requires a spiritualization of life. It must be noted that Habermas himself

36. Habermas (op. cit., 1996), p. 365

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid. p. 566

39. Manoranjan Mohanty, "Political Theory of Equality," in Andre Beteille (ed.) *Equality and Inequality: Theory and Practice* (Delhi: Oxford U. Press, 1983).

40. Ibid, p. 371

speaks of the necessity of proceeding with a "weak transcendental" idealization in communicative interactions and conversations.⁴¹ For him, communicatively acting individuals "must undertake certain idealization, for example, ascribe identical meanings to expressions, connect utterances with context-transcending validity claims, etc."⁴² But he considers such idealizations only "unavoidable" and is reluctant to explore the depth and height of such idealizations. He is reluctant to admit that supra-rational modes of being can enrich both the ground and practice of such idealizations.

The noted political theorist Fred Dallmayr told us long ago that "in his stress on performative competence Habermas consistently privileges speaking over hearing or listening."⁴³ Though in his latest work, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Habermas seems to be reluctantly departing from his preoccupation with argumentation to a field of intersubjective conversation, still he does not address the issue of self-preparation and cultivation of self vis-a-vis hearing or listening. Listening requires silence as a mode of being which may not be naturally available to participants of discourse except as imposed on them by the power of discourse or the discourse of power. Genuine listening begins with a devoted open-endedness without any a priori bias and is always eager to arrive at an emergent mid-point. Civil society is not only a space for speaking but also a space for hearing and listening as well as sharing of reflections on life as they emerge not only from discourse but also from deep silences.

Elsewhere, Habermas has written: "I think all of us feel that one must be ready to recognize the interests of others even when they run counter to our own, but the person who does that does not really sacrifice himself, but becomes a larger self."⁴⁴ This raises the issue of self-sacrifice which is only hinted at in Habermas but for a fuller exploration of its significance for rethinking civil society and its revitalization, we shall now turn to J.P.S. Uberoi's reflections on self-sacrifice and civil society.

41. Ibid, p. 4.

42. Ibid.

43. Fred R. Dallmayr, *Life-World, Modernity and Critique: Paths Between Heidegger and Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 24.

44. Jurgen Habermas, *A Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2: Life-World and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 94.

Self-Sacrifice and Civil Society: Martyrdom as a Mode of Being

The noted Indian social theorist J.P.S. Uberoi⁴⁵ in his recent insightful study of Sikhism and Gandhism argues that the renewal, revitalization and transformation of civil societies requires martyrs as their bearers, creators and transformers. Without the "loving self-sacrifice" of the martyrs and their courage to say "no" to the logic of power, the project of civil society cannot really hold itself. Uberoi does not mean that all of us have to be continuously strung by either a death instinct or an instinct for immortality in order to act as martyrs for the cause of civil society which is a cause of truth, societal autonomy and human dignity.

Martyrdom should be a part of our being so that we are not afraid to sacrifice ourselves for the cause of the freedom of civil society and the creativity and dignity of self when we are called for it. In the entire discourse of civil society, there is very little discussion on the sacrifice that self or a community of selves has to make for protecting the autonomy of civil society and the dignity of individuals. Interlocutors such as Habermas take for granted that self-sacrifice would always be a part of the painless process of self-enlargement. But Uberoi brings the issue of self-sacrifice to the center of the discourse and practice of civil society.

In his reflections on civil society, Uberoi is not within the modernist trap. He neither considers civil society as a product of the modernist transition in history (though he would not discount its significance in understanding the contour that civil society has taken in the modern past and the present) nor does he look at it through the over-determinant logic of power. For Uberoi, civil society has a universal foundation because it is a creative and critical encounter with the logic of power and power is a universal feature of all societies. Uberoi starts his book with an evocative picture in which a young prince stands in a modest attitude in front of a *faqir* seated on a platform in a wilderness. This demonstrates the humility of power in front of wisdom and the lack of interest in the acquisition of power on the part of the saints and *faqirs*. One lesson we can draw for our project of contemporary rethinking and renewal is that civil society has to have souls and community of souls

45. J.P.S. Uberoi, *Religion, Civil Society and State: A Study of Sikhism* (Delhi: Oxford U. Press, 1996).

who are not governed by the logic and desire of power (understood in the sense of Weberian domination) and have the moral and spiritual authority to provide transformative direction to the holders of power.

For Uberoi, "The martyr is one who must love his enemy in some sense since he or she is the perfect witness (*saheed-ul-kamil*) that God, who at this time takes an interest in history and politics, does not want his servant to suppose, as the dualist would, that Satanism has any true independent existence, and so *dharmayudha*, the righteous war, can be transformed into *satyagraha*."⁴⁶ While the modernist discourse of civil society has totally bracketed religion outside its realm, Uberoi urges us to understand the significance of religion, especially the spiritual dimension of religion, for the transformational project of civil society.

Religion is a part of civil society, at least, existentially and in the Indian context, multiple religions are parts of the theater of civil society and they should exist in harmony. But this harmony and aspired for co-existence among religions cannot be taken for granted as presumed by the secularists but must be an object of conscious striving and *sadhana* on the part of both self and society. If the actors of civil society do not know about each other's religions and cultivate the reverence for each other's faiths⁴⁷ then they are destined to be preys of both statism and religious fundamentalism. One important implication of this is: the project of civil society must have within it a project of learning about each other's religions and delving deeper into these in order to be able to embody the best of all religious traditions. In some ways, Sikhism has embodied that dialogue among religions as it has embodied the best of Hinduism and Islam. But Uberoi himself makes it clear: "Yet Sikhism is not complete nor self-contained; it needs to be met with pluralism, mediation of the one and the many, in civil society even more than secularism in the state."⁴⁸

46. Ibid. p. 124

47. Uberoi tells us what Gandhi had written about Islam: "Islam's distinct contribution to India's national culture is its unadulterated belief in the oneness of God and a practical application of the truth of brotherhood of man for those who are normally within its fold" (ibid, p. 109). It is an important example of reverence for another faith that an individual born into another can have.

48. Ibid. p. 150.

A creative civil society has to be a space of pluralism where we not only learn about each other's religions and develop a reverence for them but also different ethnicities and create the condition for a dialogical co-existence of different religions and ethnicities which constitute our societies. But we must realize that to speak of pluralism is to speak of the relationship between the self and the other and this relationship requires continued reconciliation⁴⁹ and dialogue which is as much ontological as it is political and procedural. Such an approach to pluralism and civil society is different from the agenda of toleration offered by scholars such as Partha Chatterjee⁵⁰ who only talk about the initiation of democratic representativeness under the aegis of the state (such as the holding of election for the Shiromoni Gurudwara Prabandhaka Committee among the Sikhs) and do not supplement these state-oriented democratic reconstructions with any project of dialogue, learning and fusion of horizons at the level of self. Chatterjee is also silent about institutions which we ought to have in civil society so that we can learn about each others' religions and cultivate reverence for them.

While Uberoi's plea for bringing martyrdom as a mode of being to the heart of self and civil society is quite refreshing, Uberoi does not provide us with any help to distinguish between martyrdom which is animated by the devotion of loving self-sacrifice and "martyrdom" which sacrifices other people's lives. In this context, Felix Wilfred (personal communication) argues that we must look at martyrdom as a product of prophetism. Prophets are those who have realized the Transcendent but are eager to transform the existent world in accordance with this realization. Prophets are prepared to lay their lives for this cause of transformation; they are ever prepared to embrace martyrdom. But while all prophets are potential martyrs, all martyrs are not prophets; all martyrs may

49. Uberoi (op. cit., 1996, vi) writes:

Even if, by some process, all non-Hindus were to be extruded from the 'heart of Aryavarta'... the problem of relationship of self and the other, or rather of self and the other self, would still remain to be addressed. This problem of humanity, national and international, cannot be solved within a framework of majority and minority, superordination and subordination ... It can be solved only by the reconciliation or negotiation of equality and difference....

50. Partha Chatterjee, "Secularism and Toleration," *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 9, 1994.

not be embodiments of self-realization and transcendent world-realization.⁵¹

By Way of Conclusion

Vaclav Havel, the President of the Czech Republic and one of the pioneers of the formation of civil society in Eastern Europe tells us in a recent article of his: "...you must know I am talking about what is called a civil society that makes room for the richest possible self-structuring and the richest possible participation in public life."⁵²

In this dialogue on civil society, we have seen how reflections on and collective actions for civil society have not paid enough attention to the calling of self-structuring and the cultivation of appropriate self. Rethinking civil society now calls us to realize that the cultivation of an appropriate self is crucial to the revitalization of the public sphere and this cultivation includes the preparation to sacrifice oneself for the sake of human dignity and freedom, autonomy and transformation of self and society. Civil society now has to be rethought and recreated as a space of reflection and for this resources from both modern movements and varieties of spiritual experiments have to be deployed. This rethinking and recreation also requires socio-political struggles as well as spiritual striving of self-realization and self-transformation as part of an integral quest, a quest which is inspired by the ideals of non-violence, radical democracy and a dignified life for all.

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51. In this context it must be noted that while Uberio refers to the Sikh and Islamic tradition, Wilfred draws our attention to the Judaic tradition where the initial act of martyrdom in Babylon was a product of ethnic mobilization rather than prophetic realization. For Wilfred (personal communication), this mobilization is not the same thing as the reflective mobilization of the self and the world of a prophet.

52. Vaclav Havel, "The State of the Republic", *The New York Review of Books*, March 5, 1998, p. 45.

State, Civil Society and NGOs

Jagabandhu Acharya

In this very enlightening contribution, Jagabandhu Acharya views critically the concept of civil society and points out its vagueness and ambiguities. Civil society has been coopted by the state and market, and the author wonders how the poor can have their interests and rights represented in the civil society. He sees the danger of sidelining of the issues affecting the poor and the concerns of middle class gaining ground in the name of civil society. Even more, the problems of the marginalised are blunted and are being fitted into a homogenising framework of civil society. For the civil society to be steered to the cause of the poor, it should take into account the differentiation of caste, class and other forms of stratification, and should be related to "the basic problematic of legitimacy, accountability and representation of people's interests". In this scheme of things, state is not an institution which the poor will relegate to the background, but an agency which they should demand to fulfill its responsibilities towards their well-being — something the poor should continue to do through people's movements.

1. The traps of civil society

At the turn of the millennium, humanity stands at the crossroads once again, perplexed and uncertain, both over the epoch that was and the future ahead, apparently engulfed as it were by a deep economic, political, ethical and intellectual crisis. In a sense, it looks as if one is back at the chaotic inter-war period!

The euphoria of the post-war boom ended in the early 70's, and since then there has been a perpetual economic crisis, that is slow but stinging. The golden years of the 50's and 60's were carved out under the Keynesian doctrine of state intervention and state control. That god having failed, free marketeers have raised their heads again, and the neo-liberals are having a field day. With rising middle class consumerism, the *celas* are back again, and this time even sponsoring international events attended by heads of government. But unemployment is rising worldwide, even in the advanced countries, and poverty is increasing. Despite the fanfare about the advancement of democracy, the access of the poor to decision making processes remains as elusive as ever.

The end of the Cold War has not improved the conditions of world peace. There has been no let up in conflict and violence. The new globalisation process, the weakening of the nation state and the strengthening of the cultural, economic and political hegemony of multi-national capital, have given rise to a situation of unprecedented vulnerability and uncertainty for the poor.

Such periods of crisis invariably give rise to myths and shibboleths, paraded as a conceptual panacea - both to rationalise the past, and to serve as an anchor for the projects of the future. "Civil society" is one such magical toolbox dominating development debates these days. It seems to possess a mystifying appeal for many, and claims to hold the key to the future of humanity.

It is common to hear questions like the following: How can "civil society" be strengthened in the "transitional" societies? What funding policies can effectively facilitate this process? What is the position and role of NGOs in "civil society"? While some official donors have begun articulating strategies of supporting "people's organisations" directly, bypassing the state and even the NGOs, there are some NGOs who see themselves as the "civil society" itself! There are others (some of the so-called "advocacy NGOs") who feel that the distinction between the north and the south, between the west and the east, etc. are all irrelevant in view of the supposedly emergent "global civil society"!

While "civil society" is not a neologism, its current usage is a daring attempt at rewriting the lexicon of political science. Nay, more. The debate has gone beyond the realm of mere definitions. Efforts are being made to articulate political positions, development perspectives, strategies, agenda and alliances.

In a sense, the whole debate around "civil society" is both a temptation and a trap for NGOs as well as donor agencies. Nonetheless, given the stakes involved, there is no way one can shy away from the debate. To ward ourselves against these traps, therefore, it is important to keep a few concerns at the back of our mind:

1. Why this resurrected debate on civil society and state, at this age and time?
2. What actually are the agenda in this debate, and whose agenda are they? Are they a northern agenda?
3. Is there any linkage between the recent trends in globalisation,

liberalisation and structural adjustment on the one hand, and the civil society initiative on the other?

4. Why is the thrust on "transitional" societies?
5. Is there an "ideal" civil society which is being projected as the proto-type for the rest of the world?
6. What does strengthening of civil society mean for the poor, in terms of their rights and in terms of the conditions of their poverty? Is this initiative more in favour of the middle classes rather than the poor?

This article is an attempt to unravel the myth of "civil society", analyse the real issues affecting the poor in the backward countries, and identify the tasks before development agencies today.

2. Genesis of the Recent Civil Society Debate

The golden era of post-war boom from 1944 to 1973 was founded upon the acceptance of the doctrines of state intervention, state control and centralization, cutting across political systems and ideological frameworks — whether inspired by the Russian central planning, or the Keynesian mixed economy and welfare state, exemplified in the Rooseveltian "New Deal" type of regimes. As the euphoria of the boom came to a catastrophic end, it became clear that Keynesianism could no longer prop up a crisis-ridden capitalism, leading to the revival of theories of the free market and reduction of sphere of the state, personified in neo-liberal regimes of the Reaganites and the Thatcherites.

The first major cultural, political and intellectual critique of this crisis came from the new left, in the form of the May '68 students movement in France, which rapidly spread across Europe and lasted for about a decade. What came under sharp criticism during those days were the failure of Keynesianism, mixed-economy, state-intervention and the regime of armaments production. Thus the seventies saw a major debate on the state, its relationship with civil society, capital and ideology, whose fervour, depth and rigour of analysis on such issues, however, died out soon after the decline of the new left.

As the post-war boom turned into a nightmare in the early 1970's, the Cold War entered into a second phase. The 70's and 80's saw a major restructuration of international finance capital — at a scale of operation and mobility which was unheard of ever before.

The very nature of operation of international finance capital tends to bypass the state. In a sense, the recent trends in globalisation, structural adjustment, world trade practices, demonstrate the power of the former and the gullibility of the latter. The end of the Cold War, the emergence of the so-called "uni-polar" world, and the change in the nature of the global capitalism, have further contributed to this consolidated process.

The decimation of the Russian empire and the liberation of a host of "transitional" nation-states from under the Russian hegemony, provided a new territory for the rapidly expanding multi-national finance capital to conquer and annex. The need for weakening the nation-state and strengthening the "civil society" in these countries is part of this global agenda to create a conducive environment for free play of the market forces and the global finance capital. The first proofs of the pudding have come in the form of increasing poverty and food-insecurity, loss of social sector benefits and the marginalisation of the poor, political instability, crime, drugs, violence and corruption.

Excessive individualism in some of the most advanced countries have also led to the decline of some of the key institutions of social life such as the family. The nostalgic search for a panacea to rebuild the family have led many reformers to seek in the civil society agenda the possible tools for their social engineering.

The role of citizens movements in overthrowing military dictatorships in many parts of the world was another reason for the popularity of the agenda involving people's initiatives. The civil society agenda provided one such framework to understand and explain these movements.

In the wake of the failure of the Keynesian state due to the drying up of state resources under the crisis and under its own weight due to bureaucracy, inefficiency and corruption, the 1980s and 1990s saw a new policy agenda with the concepts of good governance and accountability of the state, etc. The aim was to trim down the state to a lean and thin manageable size. The civil society agenda fitted the bill well, and thus became a part of the funding conditionality of agencies like the World Bank and IMF. Subsequently, after the end of the Cold War, a large number of other concerns compatible with the new globalisation agenda have got added onto the civil society framework that has been gaining ground over the last few years.

3. Unpackaging Civil Society

3.1 What is civil society?

First of all, there is no clear *definition* of civil society as such, available in the current debate. Instead, we find a plethora of *opinions* either on what "civil society" is or what it should be.

For some, civil society refers to the *real world activities* of volunteer networks and informal associations. For others "true" civil society is an *ideal social order* never fully present anywhere, but which must be striven for.

For some, civil society is the foundation of liberal democracy and a means to strengthen the latter. For others, it is an *end*, a state of individual freedom, going beyond governance and liberal democracy.

Is market a part of the civil society or outside it? For some, civil society is a space between the individual and the state, an area where there is a free play of private institutions, NGOs, *free markets* and religious institutions.

For others, civil society is a sector outside and opposed to the market, a realm where non-profit voluntarism prevails.

Is family a part of the civil society? Some say yes, family is an institution of civil society. Others say no.

Are political parties a part of the civil society? Some say yes, others say no.

For some civil society is an ensemble of certain civility, defined in terms of a set of universal values and "civilised" (Western) patterns of behaviour. Some others are prepared to accommodate religious and cultural heterogeneity. There are yet others who distinguish "civicness" from "civility".

What is the difference between civil society and society as such? We are presented banal notions like the following: civil society is both the whole and a part of the whole!

In one of the more popular (reified) versions, civil society is presented as a part of a "trinity formula". Here civil society is supposed to constitute the so-called "third sector" alongside the state (first sector) and the "market" (second sector). This formula is presenting in the form of three overlapping circles, representing these "sectors", their respective sizes on the map serving to illustrate their respective strengths in society. The desirable ideal condition is stated to prevail when all the circles are of uniform diameter,

signifying a balance between the state, the market (peculiarly defined in terms of profit-making business) and the civil society.

As a matter of fact, a distinctive feature of this perspective is its preoccupation with dilettante methods- ahistorical models and magical geometric shapes, of triangles, circles and arrows in lieu of analysis of historical relations. Thus it is not surprising that instead of political economy (as it used to be called earlier, or the current disciplines of political science, sociology or economics), the services of “management science” is summoned to define and explain “civil society”.

Usually the authors of the trinity formula define “civil society” through a principle of exclusion — that which is neither “state” nor “market”. The “state” is simplistically equated with coercion and domination, and “market” with profit-making and competition. The civil society (the realm of the “citizen”) is stated to be outside all these, as embodiment of altruism, cooperation, liberty, democracy and development. Non-government development organisations (NGOs) are located in the centre stage of this third sector, as harbingers of democracy and participatory social development.

The underlying assumption of this model is a linear conception of history where all countries will, and should make a transition towards a certain Western form of governance and democracy, supposedly characterised by a strong and vibrant civil society. And thus the task of donors and international development agencies should be to strengthen the civil society in the backward (“developing”, “transitional”) countries.

Howsoever attractive this might sound, such models are untenable in theory and devoid of history.

3.2 Civil Society and the Market

To begin with, it is erroneous to assume that only the profit-making business sector constitutes the market. The ideal principles of market—individualism, self-interest, freedom to buy or sell, equal status among buyers and sellers, right to own and alienate property, calculative rationality to maximize one’s benefits, and competition—operate equally well within the real life of the so-called civil society. The so-called civil society organisations operate very much along these principles in organising their membership, conducting their activities, and pushing forward their agenda and interests.

On the other side, one could, with equal certainty, demonstrate the prevalence of the so-called principles of civil society in what is being characterised as the market - e.g. collaboration alongside short-sighted profit-making, and corporate charity towards community organisation and welfare. In other words, one could demonstrate that the development of "civil society" takes place according to the principles of the market, and goes hand in hand with, and in fact in some ways driven by, the strengthening of the market. Similarly, the operation of the principles of the market presupposes the ethicality of the civil society in following the rules of the game.

3.3 *Civil Society and the State*

Historically, as well as logically, the principle of the state derives from, and is entrenched within, the concept of the civil society. The civil society is as much the *precondition* as the *product* of the modern state. The quiet social transformations of 17th and 18th centuries in Europe leading up to the growth of the modern state, demonstrate a growing reciprocal relation of determination between the evolving civil society and the different forms of state.

To begin with, the conditions for unrestrained growth of capitalism were created under the auspices of the absolutist state, a transitional form of state preceding the revolutionary modern state. The laws facilitating the movement of goods, money and people, the concentration of land and capital, the national debt and the credit system, the laws against the uprooted poor, were all directed at strengthening capitalist production and circulation. The expanding capitalism used the power of the state, both at home and abroad through colonialism, whether through cajolery, bribery or force, to secure rights and privileges for the burgeoning business class to expand the base of the manufacturing system and the markets. At the same time, this also led to the gradual erosion of the rights and privileges associated with modes of social organisation that were becoming unproductive.

The expansion of capitalist production gradually led to the expansion of the world market and an international division of labour, that needed an enabling environment, with appropriate political guarantee. The very expansion of the market led to competition, and hence a host of rights facilitating the circulation process, e.g. the notions of equal status of buyer and seller, and to the creation of a society of atomised self-centred individuals.

With all the enabling mechanism that the absolutist state created for the expanding capitalism, however, it was founded on domination and force. On the other hand these various conditions and individual rights associated with the expanding market needed to be supported, enforced and guaranteed. They needed to move away from a realm of adhocism, contingency and domination, to one of organic reproduction, hegemony and necessity. This demanded a form of state that was organically tied up with the civil society, and whose conditions of reproduction were ensured through the reproduction of the civil society itself.

The ideals of the modern state are founded on institutions of liberalism — freely elected government, rule of law, citizens' rights and liberties, including freedom of speech, publication and assembly. It must be kept in mind, however, that these were the *ideals*, that inspired the revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, and not necessarily the real foundations of the various forms of state that came into existence. In countries like France and England, the organic development of a civil society provided the ground for a strong liberal democracy with representative government, rule of law and the recognition of a whole gamut of citizens' rights, and the institutional mechanisms and value systems conducive to the sustenance of liberal democracy.

While the rise of the modern state was founded upon these historical premises, the state in turn strengthened and consolidated the institutional basis of the nascent civil society with a view to create an ideologically hegemonic base for itself. Thus the developed, matured modern state, in its own interest and in the interest of the dominant system of social production would strengthen and reproduce the civil society. In fact, the rights of the actors of the civil society (including citizenship, right to organise and right to express, etc.) are recognised, defined, interpreted and guaranteed by the state. Far from ruling by pure *domination* (a characteristic of absolutism), the modern state rules mainly by *hegemony* (through ideology and consensus), which it seeks to build by strengthening the civil society.

The corresponding forms of the state in the colonies were — (a) absolutist colonialism and (b) capitalist colonialism followed by independent nation-state, as could be distinctly deciphered in the case of India. If the institutions of civil society in India appeared to be a creation of the colonial state during its second phase,

this has to be seen in the background of the destruction of a whole range of institutions and relations during the brutalisation of the first phase of colonialism. For the rest, it is enough to say that state—civil society pairs cannot be compared across the metropolis and the colonies, abstracted from the world—historical relations between the latter.

In the current concept of civil society, an idealised Western model of democracy is being projected as the historic destiny of humanity — as if equality and human rights prevailed in the developed West! It is forgotten that many colonial societies never had a “feudalism” as was seen in Europe. In fact, recent historiography has clearly demonstrated that colonialism thwarted the possibilities of native capitalist development (hence, its organic growth of civil society) in many countries (e.g. India) where enough conditions for capitalist development existed before the British came in. Many ex-colonies had their own forms of “democracy” appropriate to their cultural context — which were as romantic or idyllic as the much glorified Western democracy.

In trying to subsume everything under the western-liberal notions of what was “civil” and “democratic”, it undermines local history, culture and alternative paths of development.

It is important to note that the strength and vitality of the democratic institutions, have always depended on the health of capitalism, and oscillated along with the latter's phases of boom and slump. Thus the periods of capitalist crisis were almost always accompanied by an abridgement of democratic rights of the people.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the emerging new democratic mass movements and the socialist labour movements, especially in Europe, presented a deep and passionate commitment to carry forward the values of Enlightenment and democratic liberalism to their logical conclusion. With the gigantic capitalist crisis during the inter-war period, liberal democracy came under sharp attacks from many quarters—the Roman catholic church, the feudal classes of the old order defending rigid social hierarchy, and the ultra-right fascists and nazists. They all had in common a hatred towards the modern scientific culture and the values and institutions of liberal democracy, a fear of and hatred towards socialist revolution believed to abolish private property and encourage atheism, and a love for extreme nationalism, militarism and physical coercion. The success of nazism was premised upon the historic defeat

of social democratic movements, the inability of the old state apparatus to come to terms with the new reality, and the organization and nazification of the uprooted old middle class (the latter could very well fall under the currently advanced category of "civil society organisations").

3.4 *Civil society and the poor*

The trinity model presents an illusory abstraction of an ensemble of individual citizens as constituting an implied homogeneous civil society. This is a crude reproduction of theories of possessive individualism of 17th century, depicting the society as a sum of atomised, egotistic, individual interests, abstracted from the real social relations of production. The recent revival of this illusory notion in the west, however, is premised on a certain degree of homogenisation and integration of the majority, with a somewhat blurred class distinction and consciousness, precipitated during the boom years. This illusion of course has been slowly cracking up under the subsequent period of rising unemployment and skewed income distribution.

The attempted reduction of the interests of the poor and the deprived sections of the society into the homogenised melting pot of civil society, is fraught with a number of insurmountable difficulties. In reality, people are organised into a host of relations based on hierarchy, exclusion-inclusion, position in the social production process, status in the social order, and so on. In fact, the greatest paradox of the civil society is that the opponents of civil society are its legitimate components.

How do such relations of stratification or differentiation translate in the civil society? Since all the citizens do not have equal access to knowledge, resources, opportunities and endowments, how are the conflicting interests reconciled? What are the forms of articulation of these divergent or even antagonistic interests? What are the different forms of leadership that would express an organic articulation of the interests? What are the different forms of leadership that would express an organic articulation of the interests of the poor marginalised sections of society? A sentimentally conceived good citizenship would hardly be a sufficient cause to unite people of different classes into a common "civil society initiative" (not considering, for the moment, the complex ideological bond like nationalism, mistakenly identified by some as a hallmark of advanced civil

society). Insofar as this model obfuscates the structural distinction between the different social groups—classes, castes, ethnic groups and other dimensions—by poverty-focused approach which has been the avowed hallmark of many development agencies.

Did not the state, to begin with, arise, among others, out of the need for mediating the inherent conflicts existing among groups of persons within the civil society? Then, to define civil society in a way that ignores the fundamental conflicts of interests, is to betray a clear lack of understanding of the basic inequalities that pervade the social fabric.

Clearly, misplaced are those development agenda, that get bugged down in the superficial homogenising discourse on civil society, bypassing some of the basic rights of the poor (power to access, manage and control relevant productive resources, knowledge, technology and environment, security over food, work and basic necessities of life, social equity, cultural freedom and dignity, and so on), rights that come into sharp conflict with the privileges of the powerful and entrenched segments whether within the civil society or outside it, whether within the boundaries of the nation-state or outside it.

4. The Southern Scenario

4.1 Globalisation and the Market Economy

Historically, the poor have suffered in the hands of the state, the market economy and the influential sections of the civil society.

The most important concern in the south is the impact of the recent trends in globalisation and the unprecedented expansion of the sphere of the market—increased poverty and unemployment, decline in food security, increased marginalisation of the poor, crass consumerism and over consumption of the rich, and deepening inequality between the rich and the poor.

The poor are defined by their lack of access to and control over resources necessary for a dignified existence. The manifestation of their subordinated position in the social production process has been their subordinate relation in the market, which has always tended to marginalise them, and of which there has been a revolutionary expansion in the last few years.

Market is a relation of equality — in terms of the formal status of the buyer and the seller, but not in terms of the bargaining

power. The compulsion of survival has forced many into unequal exchanges under duress, into the brink of starvation. Unequal access to knowledge, information, resources, technology and credit, further marginalises the already disadvantaged, and increases the burgeoning gap between the rich and the poor.

For example, while on the one hand, the compulsion of going in for commercialised monocropping, has sometimes increased the food insecurity of the poor, their low purchasing power and the cheaper price of crops elsewhere have forced many to adopt the food habits of alien cultures, and increased their dependency on the latter.

While the neo-liberal priests of the free market do all they can for the free flow of goods and capital across continents, there seems to be a taboo when it comes to migration of labour. In fact, the last two decades have seen a decline in cross border migration of labour, as most of the developed countries have tightened their immigration policies, even to the extent that illegal immigrants are subjected to all kinds of inhuman treatment, including the "civility" of throwing out boat loads of illegal immigrants into sea water.

Under the new global patent laws, the traditional heritage of knowledge pertaining to traditional medicine, seed and even food habits of the backward countries have come under the threat from advanced market economies. While the energy consumption and pollution levels of the advanced countries have sky rocketed over the years, highly disproportionate to their population, the backward countries are being forced to pay for and protect the nature, the environment and the world.

The backward countries have been subjected to unwarranted restrictions on the transfer of appropriate technology. And within the countries, the tools and institutions of modern technology and credit systems have conspired to keep vast masses of the poor significantly marginalised. The knowledge production and circulation system being highly monopolised, the information superhighway has left the poor high and dry on the fringes — without access to or control over vital information affecting their lives.

And yet, globalisation is often presented as an inevitable historical tendency that could not be resisted, thus justifying and perpetuating the historic inequities among nations and social groups, and blurring the visions of vast masses of the poor.

4.2 *Role of the State*

Paradoxically, in the backward countries, the poor are a victim of both the development of the modern state and its lack of full development.

The state, behind its facade of neutrality, has often facilitated and supported the interests of the more powerful sections of society. In a sense, it would be inappropriate to say that the state has been weakened under the recent structural adjustment programme. While it has abdicated most of its welfare functions, its role in consolidating the globalisation process and strengthening the market forces has been very pro-active. The end of the Cold War has meant a breakdown of international power balance, seriously threatening the neutral space that many third world countries used to enjoy, and thus subjecting many of these states to the dictates of international finance capital.

One of the most critical developments in some of the backward countries is the breakdown of the state machinery, leading to open civil war and conflict between different class, caste and ethnic groups. The rise of terrorist violence and insurgency is often a reflection of the failure of the state on the one hand, and the marginalisation of vast segments of population from the so-called mainstream of national development on the other.

Over-grown bureaucracy, top-down planning and administration of programmes, widespread corruption in public life, have all contributed to a loss of credibility of the state and its alienation from vast masses of the poor.

And yet, the state in these backward countries has the potential, and often the constitutional mandate, of playing an important role:

- (a) in regulating the adverse effects of the market forces;
- (b) in protecting the weak and the powerless from the strong and the powerful, in maintaining law and order;
- (c) in social redistribution of wealth;
- (d) in protecting national development interests from the onslaught of monopolistic foreign capital and hegemonic drive of the super powers;
- (e) in protecting certain ethicality and culture;
- (f) in providing social sector benefits and welfare to the people.

And it is the right of the people to demand that the state fulfill these obligations.

Those who support the abdication of the state of its welfare responsibilities forget, for example, that there is no country in the world which has made significant advancements in literacy or basic health care without an active role by the state. The concern, therefore, should be not whether the state should mobilise resources and take direct responsibility for protecting the basic rights of the poor. There is no negotiation on that. The concern is how to implement these programmes, and what should be the role of the communities and NGOs in their management.

However, it is not enough to demand that the state should provide for the basic rights of the poor. It is absolutely necessary that appropriate enabling conditions should be created so that the poor can be organised and empowered not only to demand their rights, but also to be able to access and manage their resources and institutions.

Development is essentially a question of political power. The main concerns in the backward countries, therefore, are the empowerment of the poor, their informed participation in the decision making processes, and the accountability of public institutions to the people.

The strategies and agenda of the NGOs and development agencies must be addressed towards these concerns.

5. Agenda For NGOs and Development Agencies

5.1 *NGO legitimacy and accountability*

Do NGOs as a rule stand out as a sector different from and opposed to the state and the market? What are their roles, their strengths and limitations?

Partly, the problem lies in the vagueness surrounding the word NGO, by which is meant all kinds of agencies, starting from voluntary development agencies, to NGOs propped up as enterprises through grants to students from "transitional" societies graduating in the USA. Traditionally, NGOs consisted of voluntary groups, who powered by altruism and concern for fellow beings, would work among the poor, providing services, building capabilities, and organising them. The concept of development NGOs, funded and encouraged either by the state or by various funding agencies, is of recent origin. There has been attempts by many in the past to classify NGOs using various parameters—voluntary versus professional, service-

delivery versus empowerment orientation, locally funded versus foreign funded, etc. and to analyse their strengths and weaknesses. We, therefore, restrict ourselves here to their role in relation to the poor.

The experience of some of the large successful NGOs in the developing countries (Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, SEWA in India) demonstrate a kind of collaboration and incorporation, rather than conflict or exclusiveness between the concerned NGO on the one hand and the state (and the market principles) on the other. Many of the NGOs, especially those that have come into existence in the last two decades, operate within a service-delivery framework, complementing the instrumentalities of the state, as the latter's extended arms. Often NGOs served the purpose of taking over areas of service abdicated by the state. These service-delivery NGOs are usually frowned upon in development circles for creating a perpetual dependency without sustainability of development. However, sometimes the funding dynamics are so compulsive that in their drive for short term efficiency and target achievement, NGOs grow and operate in a manner which make their withdrawal difficult.

One would also notice that sometimes even the so-called empowering interventions at the micro-project level are more or less fully compatible with the avowed policies of the state, independent of the level of democracy prevalent. It is not by accident that the sustainability of NGO interventions are usually defined in terms of market sustainability and government replicability.

The notion of civil society, whichever way defined, is nothing if not related to the basic problematic of legitimacy, accountability and representation of people's interests.

The state under a democracy is supposed to be accountable to the civil society (its citizens), and must draw its legitimacy from it. What are NGOs accountable to and where would they draw their legitimacy from in the civil society? Whose interests do the NGOs legitimately represent? And here we distinguish NGOs from mass organisations and membership bodies. One can cite a number of instances where the so-called advocacy-NGOs have killed a cause and compromised the local initiative and organisation through substitutionism. The so-called professional NGOs, with paid employees and dependent on donor funding, are particularly liable to develop and claim fake stakes, and despite good intentions,

may end up killing the initiative of the primary local stakeholders. More so in cases of donor driven, donor designed NGO programmes. The cooption of many NGOs by the state and the corporate sector in relief and rehabilitation programmes of mega projects involving the displacement of the tribal population, is a case in point.

Many NGOs might have started with good intentions, but have willy-nilly got sucked into the donor's agenda of money pushing (meeting financial targets, clearing the reserves, and so on) without regard to the needs and concerns of the poor. Some of them are facing an identity crisis today, mainly because of their alienation from the poor and marginalised sections, a status earned in exchange of excessive accountability to the donors.

In reality, more than the so-called professional NGOs, it is rather the people's organisations and the movement of the working masses that have displayed a great deal of autonomy vis-a-vis the state, and played a significant role in strengthening the institutions of liberal democracy. The best role that the NGOs could and should play would be to act as catalysts in the formation and consolidation of the people's organisations and their capacities, and of the enabling environments for such organisations to operate.

Although the state guarantees the rights of all, the policies are framed in such a way as to leave the poor without any rights; even their basic minimum needs remain unsatisfied to a large extent. Many a time, advocacy and dialogue have failed, the need of the day therefore is the organisation of the masses for a better articulation of the rights of the poor. The role of the NGOs in such cases would be to play a supportive role in mass education and organisation.

The NGOs can play important role by lobbying and backing up people's movements so as to ensure that the state carries out its responsibilities to the people and is more accountable to them. Given that the state was the most powerful agency, the NGOs should build up their capacities, enlarge their knowledge base, and build up issue-based alliances with other agencies and groups so as to improve their effectiveness.

5.2 *Funding Agencies and Northern NGOs*

There are serious implications of the civil society agenda put forth by the northern government and donor in terms of new funding policies, and financial trends supporting the diminishing role of

the state. Often donor preferences are being given priority and peripheral issues are highlighted by international organisations, some of which are trying to force the NGOs to nail the state.

Foreign official funding, most of which goes back to the same country in some form or the other, has adversely influenced the local initiative and trade. Many of these funding agencies are not interested in issues of participation and empowerment, but seem to be keen on mere resource transfer, often leading to the destruction of the local governance structures and creation of dependency.

In recent years, there has been increasing direct funding by some northern governments to southern NGOs, bypassing the state. There has also been efforts to bypass NGOs, and directly fund the people's organisations. Often such aid is prepackaged and may not address the issues and concerns of the target groups, and there may not be any withdrawal policy, which would tend to play havoc with the institutions and lives of the local population.

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Religions in Civil Society

Michael Amaladoss

In this concise article, M. Amaladoss presents four models of relating religion and state. He highlights the fourth model which is a positive approach to religious pluralism and discusses it with reference to the Indian Constitution. Distancing himself from social structural orientations which assume that the inter-religious conflicts will cease with economic development, he draws our attention to the importance of a continuing inter-religious dialogue and conversation that is respectful of differences. Such a dialogue can help us to overcome many tangles and lead us towards conflict-resolution. If, in general, dialogue has been, in the past, associated with the issue of evangelization and liberation, today, the author feels, we need to move towards a dialogue of religions as members in the civil society. It will be a dialogue centered on what concerns the public order and well-being.

The age of globalization seems to have provided a new intensity to inter-religious conflicts. One would have expected that the exchange of information facilitated by the extent and rapidity of the mass media would have promoted an increasing understanding and consequent acceptance among the religions. Instead, the processes of globalization seem to have radicalized opposition between religions. There are many reasons for this. First of all, globalization is promoting a secularist, materialistic culture against which the religions need to defend themselves and reaffirm their identity and relevance to society. Secondly, migration has made societies religiously pluralistic everywhere. The other believer is not somewhere far away. S/he is next door impinging on my awareness everyday with her/his religious and correspondingly cultural difference. Thirdly, in a struggle for scarce resources, especially among the poor of the world, religious identity becomes communalistic when the cementing force of religion is made use of for promoting an economic and political agenda. People who share the same beliefs are made to feel that they also share the same economic and political interests which they have to defend and promote.

As a matter of fact, observers of social movements foresee that religious and cultural divisions will play an increasing role in global conflicts. Samuel P. Huntington concludes an analysis of the contemporary scene:

In the emerging era, clashes of civilizations are the greatest threat to world peace, and an international order based on civilizations is the surest safeguard against world order¹.

It is significant that civilizations are identified with religions. While the Christian civilization is identified as 'western', the others are identified as Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. (Pp.26-27). Should the religions become unwilling instruments and victims of such global civilizational conflicts or could they play a prophetic role to bring peace and harmony among people? What role are religions playing in civil society? Can they play alternative roles? Such questions are of great interest to many believers. While every religion has its share of fundamentalists, many believers think that religions should be forces for peace rather than conflict. How can they do so? We can try to answer these questions only after we have seen how religions have related and relate to civil society; how civil societies have handled and are handling religious pluralism and what impact will globalization have on these matters.

Religion and Society

Though economic and political structures are important in providing a material foundation to civil society, it is culture that unites a group of people by offering them a particular world view that provides meaning and vision to their lives, a system of values that governs their behaviour, a framework of rituals that create and regulate their relationships. Religion is the deepest element in culture, in so far as it deals with the ultimate concerns of life, its origin and goal and its final significance. Culture and religion are communitarian. Though we can note a progressive differentiation between religion and society in the course of history at least in the West, they are closely related. The civil authority has always tried to use the strong cementing force of religion to hold the people together. The early ecumenical Councils were convened and presided over by emperors who seemed to have been more interested in the

1 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (London: Touchstone Books, 1996), p.321.

unity of faith than the Bishops. In former times, kings were considered gods or sons of God: religion was identified with a socio-political group. Even today no real distinction between religion and civil society is accepted in the Islamic tradition. In Hinduism there was a distinction between priests and kings, but they were linked to each other by a variety of mutual obligations.

In Christianity civil society has progressively freed itself from the domination of religion, so that we can speak of a secularization of society, though the secular order had to fight for its freedom all along the way. The consequence has been the privatization of religion. Strictly speaking, at the level of civil society, what we have is a greater or lesser separation between religion (Church) and civil society (State). This separation however may be more apparent than real. In most European countries, Christian democratic parties with a religious inspiration still play an important role. Even in France, which is the most secular constitutionally, other religions do not enjoy the same rights as Christianity. England still has an established religion: its monarch is also the head of the national Church. In the United States of America, analysts speak of a civil religion which has strong roots in a liberal Protestant Christian tradition. The link between religion and society is so strong that secularism itself takes on the trappings of a 'religious' ideology.

States and Religious Pluralism

It is because of this close link between religion and society that religious pluralism in civil society becomes problematic. How have the States handled the phenomenon of religious pluralism among its people? Looking around the different States in the world, we can see broadly four ways of coming to terms with religious pluralism in the context of civil society.

In Marxism-inspired societies religions have no public space at all at the level of the political order. At the level of civil life, they may have a very controlled presence, strictly private. Religions are positively discouraged, marginalized and even persecuted. Pluralism is no problem at all.

We have, secondly, confessional States. Most States where a majority of the people are Muslims declare themselves Islamic states. They may go further and adopt Shariat as the law of the land. Religious minorities are promised freedom to practice their religion, though they may be harassed in various ways. In any

case, the religions of the minority groups become the private affair of those groups. They can have no direct place or influence in civil society. The minority groups therefore can continue as second class citizens, without any real participation in civil society. Such a situation is true also of migrants in Europe today, even if they are considerable minorities. They are not recognized as citizens even if they have lived there for more than a generation; or they may have voting rights, but have no real influence in the cultural and civil society of the country outside their own group.

A third way of solving the problem of religious pluralism in civil society is to have a strict separation between religion and the State. The State is said to be secular. The secular spirit may also spread to other areas of civil life like education, social services, and even culture. The declared aim of such societies is to reduce religions to the private sphere. As long as religions remain in the private sphere, they will not be disturbed. Such secularism may be promoted aggressively, as in the United States of America. Or it may be fervently hoped for without being imposed as is the case of some groups in India. There were two groups among the makers of the Indian Constitution.² One group was committed to the 'scientific spirit'. They believed that with the progress of science and technology religion would eventually weaken and disappear. In the meantime they were ready to tolerate the practice of religion provided it remained private. Another group, however, interpreted Indian secularism as a positive attitude of equal respect to all religions. This then leads us to the fourth solution to the problem of religious pluralism in civil society.

A Positive Approach to Religious Pluralism

Instead of trying to describe this fourth solution in the abstract, let us see what the Indian Constitution proposes and then critically comment on it.³ The aim of civil society is to secure liberty, equality, fraternity and justice for all the citizens. These are spelt out in terms of fundamental rights. The fundamental rights include the liberty to practice and propagate any religion of one's choice. This

2 For an interesting discussion of the whole issue of secularism from the perspective of history as well as that of different religions see T.N.Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997)

3 See Gurpreet Mahajan, *Identities and Rights. Aspects of Liberal Democracy In India*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998)

freedom however is "subject to public order, morality and health". The State should not discriminate among its citizens on grounds of religion. The State however reserves the right to make laws "regulating or restricting any economic, financial or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice". (Art.25)

Besides this general protection of liberty of religious profession and practice, the Constitution also protects the right of minority groups, including religious ones, to protect and promote their identity through appropriate means like schools and other development institutions. We can note here a tension between the desire to protect the identity and liberty of different religious groups and at the same time to ensure the fundamental rights and well being of the citizens under the rubric "public order, morality and health".

This tension was shown clearly in the area of laws governing the relations of citizens in civil matters like marriage and inheritance. On the one hand, the different religious groups were allowed to follow their own personal laws in these matters, on the other hand, the Constitution expressed a desire that the country should move towards a uniform civil code. Let me note here in passing that this desire of the Constitution to move towards a uniform civil code has not been respected even after nearly 50 years. One of the reasons for this is the fear of the minorities that in a society with a large Hindu majority, the uniform civil code legislated in parliament may actually turn out to be the code of the majority. Perhaps the proper way towards a uniform civil code in a pluralistic society is not through parliamentary legislation in which majority-minority factors come into play, but through widespread consultation leading to a consensus.

It is not my intention here to comment elaborately on the Indian Constitution. Let me draw the reader's attention, however, to a few interesting points relevant to our discussion. While the western approach to civil liberties is spelt out in terms of individual rights, the Indian Constitution takes seriously the identity and rights of groups, especially of the minorities. Such an approach is very much discussed today in terms of multiculturalism in North America both in the USA and in Canada. Particularly in the USA, what was touted as the "melting pot" is now becoming a "salad bowl", in which the identities of different cultural groups have to be respected and integrated in the ordering of civil society. The Indian Constitution has tried to do this seriously by its recognition of minority rights.

Secondly, a strict separation between religions and State is not adhered to. While the autonomy of the religions in the sphere of strictly 'religious' practice is respected, the State reserves the right to intervene to protect the fundamental rights of citizens even against prescriptions of religious institution and codes. Thus, for instance, untouchability has been made illegal and all are allowed to enter the temples irrespective of the caste they belong to. The Courts have also consistently intervened in defending the civil rights of people against any encroachment from religious institution. Finally, by protecting the minorities from the tyranny of the majority, it is implicitly pointing to a different type of democratic order, that will not simply be rule by the majority, but a search for consensus through ongoing conversation and consultation in which every one can participate.

Respecting Difference

In an interreligious context, the focus on cultural and religious groups rather than only on individuals and the possibility of working towards a consensus through consultation in civil matters rather than imposing the will of a majority on every one are extremely interesting when we speak about dialogue. We would expect that dialogue does precisely this: accept and respect the identity of the other religious group and work on the principle of conversation and consensus formation in setting achieving social goals, both civil and religious.

The need for such a process has been highlighted by social psychologists who have been studying situations of conflict. Sudhir Kakar, after a study of Hindu-Muslim riots in Hyderabad through extensive interviews, comes to the following conclusion:

The secularist, who views the conflict as rooted in social-structural consideration, especially economic, is more sanguine on the future of Hindu-Muslim relations. In the long run, the secularist believes, the inevitable economic development of the country will alter social-structural conditions and thus assign the conflict, as the cliché would have it, 'to the dust heap of history' as the religious identities fade and play less and less of a role in private and public life. A sceptical note on the belief in the primacy of political and economic structures in the shaping of consciousness, however, needs to be sounded...The optimistic realist,

a breed with which I identify, believes that we are moving towards an era of recognition of Hindu-Muslim differences rather than pursuing their chimerical commonalities. We are moving toward a multiculturalism, with majority and minority cultures, rather than the emergence of a 'composite culture'...The realist would say that the solution is to build a state which protects the equal rights of Hindus and Muslims to be different... Being sceptic, he is also aware that the creation of such a public realm may be a long drawn-out affair accompanied by much tension and open conflict between the communities which will strain the social and political fabric of the country.⁴

Dialogue as Conflict Resolution

I think that it is here that interreligious dialogue has an important and indispensable role to play. Exploring the nature and function of interreligious dialogue a group of Asian theologians said:

In the developing, multireligious societies of Asia, struggling towards liberation and wholeness, all religions are called to provide a common and complimentary moral and religious foundation for this struggle, and be forces for growth and communion rather than sources of alienation and conflict. They can do this only through dialogue and collaboration. The religions have a prophetic role in public life. They should not become victims either of those who seek to keep them apolitical and private, or of those who seek to instrumentalize them for political and communal ends.⁵

There seems however to be a supposition that such dialogue must focus on the commonalities between the religions and not on the differences that may be the causes of tension. Looking at the various dialogue groups in India and elsewhere in Asia, I have the impression that the different believers who come together tend to speak more on what unites them than on what they disagree about. They also tend to limit their discussion to strictly religious issues like prayer, doctrine and theology and not to speak on the social and political issues which may have their repercussion on

4 Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence*. (Delhi: Viking, 1995), pp. 252-253.

5 John Gnanapragasam and Felix Wilfred (eds), *Being Church in Asia*. (Manila: Claretian Publications, 1994), pp. 9-10.

religious conflict. The Parliament of the World's Religions, which met in Chicago in August 1993, came out with a Declaration "Toward a Global Ethic in order to global order of peace".⁶ This declaration focuses on ethical principles on which all the religions already agree. I would think that in a situation of interreligious conflict, if we wish to bring about peace, we should look into the factors that are causing the conflict rather than abstract ethical principles on which they are already in agreement.⁷ In this context we could speak of dialogue itself as conflict resolution.⁸ We could even go further and say that conflicts can be necessary and creative if we wish to promote peace with justice. As Franklin Dukes says:

In a democratic society conflict is the basis for social change. If there is to be just relationship, if change is to occur, latent conflicts must be made visible to all parties. It is through confrontation and advocacy that needs gain currency and legitimacy; in many situations it is this confrontation alone that forces the recognition of interdependence that makes negotiation possible.⁹

An examination of conflicts between religious groups will show that their cause is not often religious belief but attempts to make use of religious group identity for economic advantage or political domination. The conflicts in Ireland, Palestine, Kashmir or Indonesia have nothing to do with religion, but everything to do with economics and politics.

Conclusion

In the past, interreligious dialogue has been examined as a dimension of evangelization, which in turn was understood as directed to conversion as a change of religious allegiance. Such dialogue was contrasted with proclamation and seen as a step towards it. Dialogue then remains an activity purely at the religious level. When evangelization was understood as including liberation as the dialogue of the Gospel with the poor then interreligious dialogue was also related to the liberation of the poor. Religions together were supposed to provide the ethical and spiritual motivation and

6 See Hans Kung and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds), *A Global Ethic*. (London: SCM Press, 1993)

7 Cf. Michael Amaladoss, "Difficult Dialogue", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 62 (1998) 567-579.

8 Idem., "Dialogue as Conflict Resolution", *Ibidem*. (Forthcoming in 1999)

9 E. Franklin Dukes, *Resolving Public Conflict. Transforming Community and Governance*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.164.

inspiration for the liberative struggle. Without discounting any of these functions of interreligious dialogue in the context of the relationship of the Good News to peoples, their cultures and their religions, we should move further to understand the role of religion in civil society and see how believers of different religions living together as members of one civil society can promote peace and human well being, by highlighting the impact of religion on public order.

This seems particularly important in the era of globalization. Materialistic consumerism is the moving force behind globalization. In pursuit of monetary profit people who control the market are ready to sacrifice not only nature but the humans. The only antidote to such a movement is a counter-cultural movement of peoples that stand up for the fundamental human and spiritual values that must guide life in local and global community. Religions are not ends in themselves. They are to promote life in freedom and lead to fullness, though these goals may be understood differently by different religions. They must help people to take responsibility for their lives and their relationships and not surrender their initiative to market forces and money makers. The real alternative to globalization is not another globalizing ideology, even if it be religious. We need rather to affirm the local and the different though they are called to conversation and communion. This is a time when all people of good will, of every religion and ideology, must stand together, networking with each other, to confront the global enemy. Inter-religious dialogue can and must help to form such a coalition of people's movements.

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Society and Religious Tensions a Case Study: The Maccabean Period

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Religious tension has become a common experience in the Indian society. The present article is guided by the thought that historical examples may help to illumine our situation. This article by Fr Sampathkumar takes up for discussion the struggles between the Maccabees and the Seleucid rulers around second century B.C. The tension was mainly caused by attempts at hellenizing the Jews living in Palestine. The Jews themselves were partly responsible for this process. What began as a resistance to hellenization developed into a full-scale war of independence. Though the Maccabees succeeded in vanquishing the Seleucid army, nevertheless this struggle led to a significant re-thinking among the Jews and to a new beginning of understanding their own religious tradition. This shows that religious tensions, though unfortunate, could be also productive and purificative.

Historians often speak about tensions between the society and religions. Though these tensions sometimes lead to conflicts and struggles, we always notice that something good emerges out of them. Focusing our attention on a particular tension in the history of Israel, namely, the tension between Hellenism and Judaism, we shall highlight in this paper how this tension has ushered in a new beginning in the life of the Jews. Although tensions between religion and society of our times are quite different from theirs, yet, there is something that we can learn from them.

All-pervasive and dominant Hellenism

With Alexander the Great (336-323) the pan-Hellenistic ideal began to take off. It was his aim to achieve a union of East and West under the aegis of Greek culture. To fulfil this purpose, Alexander took Persians and other Orientals into full partnership with himself. He arranged mass marriages between his troops and the native population, and inaugurated the policy of settling his veterans and other Greeks in colonies all over his domain. Although the political unity which he created did not last long, however, his political successors in different states shared his cultural ideal. Greek colonies

sprang up everywhere. Greeks and Hellenised Anatolian adventurers, traders, and literates moved freely in the empire. Greek speedily became the *lingua franca* of the civilised world. Capitals such as Antioch and Alexandria were Greek cities. In fact Alexandria became the cultural centre of the Hellenistic world. Great philosophers such as Zeno, Epicurus, Eratosthenes, Archimedes were for sometime working in Alexandria. Even the non-Hellenistic Orientals began to produce works of science, philosophy and history in the Greek manner.

The Greek culture affected the Jews also. Palestine had a number of Greek colonies: Sebaste (Samaria) Philadelphia (Ammon), Ptolemais (Acre), Philoteria (south of the Sea of Galilee), Scythopolis (Beth-Shan) etc. All these cities soon became centres for Hellenistic culture and languages. Hellenisation took its deep roots in Palestine. By the third century, Greek thought had its influence on the Hebrew mind. For example Ben Sira, influenced by the Stoic philosophers resisted the doctrine of a future life proposed by the pre-Pharisees of his times, and maintained that one ought to do one's duties and serve God without the thought of reward.

The Greek thought was in the air and naturally it made its impact on the mind of Jewish thinkers as they began to face the problems of the times. Although the orthodox and pious Jews were not much disturbed by this new situation there were other Jews who were quite demoralised by the new situation. There were many Jews who became staunch followers of Greek culture and they found their traditional laws and customs an embarrassment. Thus we notice an irreconcilable schism dividing the Jewish community. The theocratic society of Judaism had to face this new situation.

The immediate context of the books of Maccabees was the religious crisis precipitated by the policy of the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163). This crisis was, in fact, dictated by the situation in which the Seleucid state found itself. It could not escape from it.

The Seleucid Rulers and their Policy

Antiochus III who brought Seleucid power to its great heights had to face later on humiliating defeat at the hands of the Romans. The peace terms with the Romans (Peace of Apamea, 188) required him to surrender a large portion of his state to the Romans and pay an enormous indemnity, in fact, ushered in the collapse of the Seleucid empire.

Antiochus III was succeeded by his son Seleucus IV Philopater (187-175). Though he confirmed the privileges granted to the Jews by his father, he tried to intervene in the matters of religion, particularly, in taking possession of the private funds deposited in the Temple.

Seleucus was assassinated and was succeeded by his more ambitious brother Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163). In his reign, matters came to a head. He adopted a policy that soon drove the Jews to outright rebellion. His policy was dictated by the situation of his empire. It had a heterogeneous population without a real unity, and it was threatened on every side. The Parthians from the Eastern province, the Egyptians from the south, the internal problems of Palestine and Phoenicia and the Rome's active interest in the eastern Mediterranean lands—all these presented a great threat to the unity of the empire. Therefore, he felt a desperate need to unify his people to defend the empire. He wanted also to strengthen the revenue of his realm. Hence he introduced hellenisation upon all his people. This included the following of Greek culture, the Greek way of living and worshipping Greek gods, particularly the worship of Zeus. He had no intention of suppressing any of the indigenous religions of his empire, but what he wanted was a type of political, social and religious unity. To achieve his aim, he granted the rights of Greek cities to all other cities that foster all that is Hellenistic and installed the statue of Zeus in all non-Hellenistic temples including the Temple of Jerusalem.

This policy of Antiochus Epiphanes met with great opposition from the Jews loyal to the religion of their fathers.

We need not accuse Antiochus Epiphanes alone for this religious crisis. The Jews were also responsible for the turn of events. Severe tensions existed among them regarding the desirability of Greek culture and the degree to which one could adopt it and still remain a Jew. Personal rivalries among them also contributed a lot for the tension. There existed different parties among them and each one sought to curry favour with the king. Naturally Antiochus began to meddle in Jewish religious affairs.

When Antiochus ascended the throne, Onias III was the high priest. But his brother Joshua (Greek name Jason) offered Antiochus a large sum of money for the high priest office. He also promised the king of full co-operation with the royal policy (2.Mac 4:7-9). Antiochus siezed the opportunity and made Jason as the high priest. He then set forward an active policy of hellenisation in

Jerusalem (1 Mac 1:11-15; 2Mac 4:10-15). A gymnasium was established in Jerusalem. All sorts of Greek sports were fostered. Since Greek sports were always associated with the cult of Heracles (2 Mac 4:18-20) and Hermes, young Jewish men, who participated in such sports, were to recognise those gods. This brought a lot of resentment among the pious Jews.

Antiochus also showed little care for the rights and religious sensibilities of the Jews. He plundered the Temple. He interpreted the rivalries between Jason and Menelaus as rebellion against his rule and brutally suppressed them, killing a large number of people who were viewed as the supporters of Egypt. He established a garrison in the city and the Jews were subjected to the usual form of punishment for rebellion.

Further, noticing that the Jewish way of life was very much based on religion, he issued an edict annulling the concessions given to the Jews and forbade the practice of Judaism. He suspended regular sacrifices offered at the Temple, the observance of Sabbath and the traditional feasts. He forbade also the practice of circumcision. Disobedience to his edict carried the death penalty. To crown it all, in December 167, he built in the Temple an altar to Zeus and offered swine's flesh. This action of Antiochus enraged the pious and the traditional Jews. They considered it as "abomination of desolation" and vowed to resist it at all cost. Soon the whole Judah was in armed rebellion against Antiochus.

Antiochus answered them with cruel persecution. We do not know how many Jews died in the persecution. But all these measures of Antiochus made the pious Jews to consider him an enemy of their religion. A group known as Hasidim (the pious, the loyal ones), the ancestors of the Pharisees and the Essenes, led the resistance. They soon joined Mattathias and his five sons who openly started the armed rebellion (1 Mac 2:1-28). From guerrilla warfare they moved into full-scale war of independence, commonly known as Maccabean War. They succeeded in routing the Seleucid forces and re-established their theocratic society in Judah. The defiled altar was torn down and the faithful priests were installed in office. In December 164, three years after its profanation, the Temple was rededicated with great joy. To commemorate this great event they even instituted a festival called the *Hanukkah*.

This period saw the struggle of the Jews for religious independence. The tension between the secular society and the religious

society led to persecution, struggles and war, but at the same time, it also brought in a new understanding of their religion and its relation to their life in the context of multiple social situations. We shall now highlight some of the aspects which emerged as outcome of these tensions in the Jewish society and their understanding of it.

Emergence of a developed Judaism

We know that Ezra, after the return of the Jews from Babylon, set the Jewish community in the form of religion known as Judaism. We also know that the restoration of the Jewish community after the exile did not revive the pre-exilic Israelite nation with its national institutions and cult. That order of Davidic dynasty, land, law, Temple cult and ethnic unity had been destroyed and could not be re-created. Now they had to face a different situation and different problems. In fact, in the disappearance of the well-defined ethnic-national-cultic unity they had to live in a multifaceted society, influenced by different religious beliefs, cultural impacts and languages. With old forms of life gone beyond recall, the Jews had to find some elements in their heritage and restructure their religion and life in a new way. That is what happened during this period of tension and interaction with the civil society.

Judaism slowly consolidated into a religion of the Book. The Sacred Scriptures played an important role in integrating all other features of religion. The Holy books were codified and accorded canonical status. The book of Law (Torah) was given a special position among the Holy Books. The prophets of old were revered and their oracles were considered as expressions of divine will. Even the other non-canonical books became quite popular.

Some ancient institutions such as cult, Temple etc, also received reinterpretation and application. The Temple was no longer the dynastic shrine of the house of David. It became the property of the community. Therefore, its cult was the responsibility of the community as a whole. Though the pre-exilic cult traditions were carried out, however, new adaptations and new features were added to the cult.

Some new institutions emerged. One such institution was the Synagogue, a medium of public worship alongside the Temple and cult. Similarly the Scribes gained importance in imparting the right interpretation and application of the law.

Further, the wisdom teachers began to impart practical ways for the conduct of good life and encouraged profound devotional piety, a deep ethical sense and a touching trust in God. This wisdom tradition was international. Egyptian, Akkadian and Babylonian wisdom teachings found their way into Jewish life. A number of books were written both in Hebrew and Greek by wisdom teachers of Israel. They offered secular advice on the achievement of success and happiness without any apparent reference to religion.

Righteousness through the law was believed a goal to be striven for, and attainable. It was also felt that God would reward those who faithfully followed the law and excelled in good deeds.

Even the outlook of the people changed a lot. Although we can notice a type of inward, narrow and intolerant attitude towards non-Jews, we do notice elements of openness, towards other peoples. They believed that God would visit all and save righteous Gentiles along with Israel (T.Naph 8:3). They also insisted upon the obligation to witness to their faith before nations (e.g. Tobit 13:3-4) and held that unworthy behaviour dishonoured God in their eyes (T.Naph 8:6).

To sum up, we can point out that the conflict between Hellenism and Judaism was unavoidable. As we have noted, we cannot accuse one party alone for the cause of the crisis. If a proper understanding of each other's religion, culture and religiosity had been undertaken, the tensions could have been avoided. The society should respect the religious sensibilities of different adherents of religions. Similarly, the religions also should take into consideration the facts dictated by the situation in which the society finds itself. Once this mutual openness is achieved, I am sure, the harmony between society and religion can easily be achieved.

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Christianity— Interlocutor in Civil Society

Felix Wilfred

This contribution departs from the recent incidents of attacks on the Christian community in the country and raises the question of Christianity's presence in the sphere of the larger civil society. While the Hindutva is characterized by the tendency to monopolize the entire space of the civil society, Christianity on the other hand, tends to withdraw and isolate itself. The response on the part of Christianity from a structurally isolated position or a reaction in the name of mere religious identity may not be able to come to terms with Hindutva fundamentalism. Only the kind of Christianity that is rooted in the soil, open to critique and is an active interlocutor in the public sphere, will be able to challenge the Hindutva. The article takes up some of the issues in the discussion of which one needs to be a partner, and makes some proposal for an effective participation in civil society.

No Hindu will attack Christians. Those who are involved are enemies of Hindus. (Uma Bharati¹)

The main argument against Hindu rule is that this is not a Hindu country, and that Muslims, Christians and Buddhists and others have as much right to take part in the polity of India, in the society of India as Hindus do. (Amartya Sen²)

For the Christian community in the country, the year just elapsed has been particularly painful and disconcerting. Over ninety incidents of attacks on Church-related personnel and institutions have been reported. If the month of September witnessed the sexual assault on the religious sisters in Madhya Pradesh, the days around Christmas in December saw several places of worship and Christian institutions coming under violent attack in Gujarat. Many questions of factual

1 As quoted in *The Hindu*, Jan. 3, 1999.

2 *Frontline*, Jan. 15, 1999, p.50..

nature are raised: Who are the culprits? What has been the role of the local administration, the role of the police, the government, political leaders? Disputes and controversies seem to continue in answering such factual matters, not to speak of motives and intentions.³

Such unfortunate events are likely to get repeated. As for response to these events, we can observe a certain pattern: We have the statements of some Church-leaders, conducting of protest-marches and rallies, presentation of memorandum to the authorities, closing of Christian institutions as a mark of protest, condemnation by some political parties. The same pattern of response will be repeated when fresh incidents occur. How long can such events continue to happen, and how long can one continue to give such ritual responses?

We do not really come to terms with the deeper issues by this kind of ad hoc responses which are quite inadequate. I think it is high-time that we asked some basic questions about the present-day Indian society and the Christian community, with a long-range view. We are at a critical juncture in the life of the country; we are still in the process of understanding ourselves as a nation and what that means. Part of this process is the inter-relationship among the various groups and communities subsumed under the polity. It is within this dynamic of the evolution of the nation that we have to place the difficulties being experienced by the Christian community.

In the perception of the Christian community as well as that of many impartial observers, there is no doubt that it is the Hindutva forces that are either directly involved or behind the scene engineering the growing attacks.⁴ The statements of leaders of Sangh Parivar like Ashok Singhal, Giriraj Kishore on these incidents go to confirm the nexus between the violent attacks and the Hindutva forces.

3 It is enough to read the various media reports, specially after the sexual assault on the religious sisters in Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh in September, 1998, and the attacks in Gujarat the days following December 25, 1998.

4 The various branches of Sangh Parivar, on their part, have disclaimed any involvement in such incidents. For example, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has disowned that it had anything to do with the violence in Gujarat. Cfr. The Indian Express, Jan. 3, 1999, whereas the Central team which visited Gujarat has "confirmed the involvement of the Hindu Jagran Manch, an offshoot of Sangh Parivar affiliates, VHP and Bajran Dal, in the continuing anti-Christian violence in the State" Indian Express, Jan. 1, 1999. Cfr also "Burning the Cross" in India Today, Jan. 11, 1999, pp. 24-27.

Such a connection does not escape right thinking citizens. In fact in its editorial, *The Hindu* observed:

The perception that the Parivar is working to a sinister gameplan in targeting the Christian community stands reinforced by such outrageous declarations as the one made by some high-level VHP functionaries in the context of the Jhabua nuns rape case (Madhya Pradesh), while one saw the barbaric act as an expression of the 'anger of patriotic Hindu youth against anti-national forces'...another demanded that the 'foreign missionaries should be removed from the country'...⁵

Analysis of the social process involved reveals that these forces operate with a threefold strategy:⁶ first of all there is the *stigmatization* by which the Christian community (and in other cases Muslim or Sikh communities) is branded and certain labels are attached. As example we could point out the charges of conversion and foreignness. Secondly, among the Hindutva fundamentalists there is *emulation* of the Christian community in its organizational and welfare activities as well as in its dogmatism and absolutism.

In one of the declared objective of Hindu nationalism—to establish a native religious tradition as the foundation of a "national church"—the influence of medieval Western models of religious organization is apparent. Critics have argued quite accurately that Hindutva introduces an alien proselytizing element into Indian tradition as a defensive reflex to the supposed inroads other faiths make.⁷

This kind of emulation is also referred to as "the semitization of Hinduism" (Rajni Kothari). Thirdly, *mobilization* of the masses is made by using traditional Hindu symbols against minority communities.

This particular situation, naturally, has caused a lot of anxiety and feeling of insecurity in the Christian community. The attacks suffered are enough to rouse passions and create a belligerent mood. Responding in this mood is to play into the hands of Hindutva forces which thrive by provoking confrontation and violence. The

5 *The Hindu*, editorial on Dec. 29, 1998.

6 Cfr Christophe Jeffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, Viking, Delhi, 1996, pp.522ff..

7 *Frontline*, Jan. 1, 1999, pp..

Christian community will not be moving towards a proper solution by making these incidents an emotional issue, or by seeking only immediate remedial measures. The current situation is an opportunity for rethinking the relationship of Christian community to the rest of the society. If we take time to pause and reflect we will realize how important it is for the Christian community to be an active interlocutor in the civil society—the people's space and the arena where different perceptions about society, politics, state, nation, religion, etc., could be discussed and debated openly in the spirit of dialogue and tolerance. It is a space distinct from the state and it is here the various groups and communities (including the religious) meet and interact. If the Christian community does not enter into this space of civil society and simply continues to nurse resentments against the Hindutva forces, it will only tend to isolate itself and breed within its own ranks the very fundamentalism it sees in the Hindutva and denounces.

I. Christian Involvement in Civil Society - an Imperative

At this present juncture, I see five important reasons why Christian community should involve itself in civil society.

To dispel misunderstanding about itself

Civil society, as I noted, is the space of people where they meet, interact, debate, form opinions, etc.⁸ If there is a misconception in the minds of many citizens about the Church and suspicion about what it is up to, part of the reason is within. The Christian community has not explained itself in public, and particularly has not brought to the public sphere the evolution of thought and praxis that have taken place within Christianity in the last few decades.

8 I need not go into the concept of civil society specially as it is debated today. For an overview on civil society, cfr the contribution of Ananta Giri in this issue of *Jeevadhara*. Cfr also Neera Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society. Explorations in Political Theory*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1995. The concept of civil society bears with it certain ambiguity and it can be exploited to further the cause of capitalism and market. On the other hand, the sphere of civil society is also the locus of social movements and expression of emancipatory concerns. Just as human rights can be inverted to serve the cause of the market (cfr Felix Wilfred, "Human Rights or Rights of the Poor. Redeeming the Human Rights from its Contemporary Inversions", in *Vidyajyoti*, vol.62 [1998], pp.734-752), so also civil society is open to the inversion. But the challenge today is to turn civil society into really a people's space. It is in this latter sense that I am referring to civil society in this contribution.

As a result, the dominant image of Christianity in the minds of even enlightened citizens is one of colonial times under the leadership of foreign missionaries.

It is undeniable that among Christians, at least in principle, certain noteworthy advances have been made on such important issues for the life of the polity as the relationship of Christianity to peoples of other faiths, missionary work, religious freedom, understanding of the meaning of Christian social engagement, human rights, etc. Such developments are true of most of mainline Churches. Problematic, however, is the case of various Christian sects whose aggressive mode of proselytization and denigration of other religious traditions go to confirm in the public mind the image of a Christianity of the colonial times. For the general public, there is no distinction between the mainline Churches and the sects. But we cannot ignore also the fact that the mainline Churches, sometimes and in certain issues, conduct themselves as sects, which is certainly not helpful for a sincere and open dialogue with the larger society.

No Servanthood without Subjecthood

Authentic Christianity, faithful to the Gospel, is in service to humanity. This would remain a nebulous ideal unless it is translated into the concrete context of life engulfed in political, social and cultural complexities. If the people are turned simply into "objects" of one's action, however motivated and committed it may be, it does not really amount to service. For, it ignores the subjecthood of the people, their choices, their views and perceptions, their felt-needs and expectations. The simple enumeration of what has been achieved by the Church, impressive though it may be, need not in itself be an evidence that the subjecthood of the people was implied in all that. People are not mute sheep on whom we condescend. Paternalism is not equal to service. We may draw a certain parallel to the so-called Orientalism which was an immense enterprise by the West to study the peoples of non-Western societies, their cultures, traditions, etc.⁹ It is an accumulation of knowledge, and yet it was so empty of the real knowledge of the people whose subjecthood was submerged. They were made into objects of investigation and research, and the results were academically packaged and circulated around the world.

9 Cfr Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978.

Now, civil society is an important arena in which the subjecthood of a people, a nation comes to expression. It is the sphere where people are themselves; it is the sphere where public opinion is formed. In civil society, we are faced with a plurality of views, perceptions, etc. If the service of the Church has really people as its goal, then, to be able to effectively serve, the Church needs to enter into the sphere of civil society. This is applicable also when the service is directed to Christians. Christians, as citizens, are part of the civil society, and they cannot be viewed in isolation from it and its dynamics. Any type of service which tends to isolate or disengage people from the sphere of civil society is in danger of turning them into objects.

Signs of the Place and the Art of Listening

I think, what has been said in the past decades about the “signs of the times” needs to be completed by signs of the place. Time and space are two fundamental dimensions in our human existence. The human space or context is made up of the patterns of human interaction and togetherness embedded in the culture and tradition of a people. Meaningful service of Christianity requires attention not only to the *chronos*—time (and indeed changing times), but also to the *topos*—the place, the context and its many signs. The cultural context is naturally reflected in the life of the civil society.

The attitude called for is openness to the signs of the place and the spirit of listening. Speaking has been so natural to Christianity that the past five hundred years has been practically under this sign. It is high-time to realize that the future of Christianity lies in its ability to listen. It is a rare gift. Civil society offers the Church much scope for listening and feeling, as it were, the ethos of the society and its many voices. By being an empathetic listener in the public sphere, it comes into encounter with the various streams of thought, interests and concerns with which the society is characterized. Christianity is exposed to other ways of thinking and acting, which, as a result, can lead to the reconstructing of its self-identity.

Clarification in Context

In particular, the interaction in the civil society with many other forces enables the Church to come to terms with what are perceived as practical contradictions. As is well known, dialogue with other

faiths is an important development that has taken place in Roman Catholicism as well as in other Christian denominations represented by the World Council of Churches. At least as a statement of principle, inter-religious dialogue is positively evaluated, thus bringing to an end the "Vasco da Gama Epoch" of denigration of other religious traditions as "heathen" "devilish", etc. This openness is certainly very remarkable. On the other hand, the work of mission or evangelization is also increasingly emphasized.

Now in a society like India with many religious traditions, the simultaneous emphasis on dialogue as well as mission cannot but cause quite a lot of confusion in the minds of the general public. It is true that the relationship between dialogue and mission or evangelization has been the object of much discussion and clarification in the past few years. But these reflections have remained mostly among the ranks and files of the clergy and within the walls of ecclesiastical institutions. What we need to realize is that clarification of these issues within the Christian community alone is inadequate. Given the social and political consequences of the work of mission and conversion, the matter needs to be clarified in the public sphere. The failure could lend credence to the suspicion of Hindutva forces about conversion, and strengthen further its political strategy of stigmatization.

A discussion of the Christian official claim to be able to pursue simultaneously dialogue and mission can help to overcome what cannot but appear to the general public as a contradiction in practice, if not in theory. A clarification on the matter on the arena of civil society is something very much called for at this critical juncture, and the Church cannot today shy away. For, there is an impression at least in some segments of the Hindu community that the traditional tolerance of Hinduism has been exploited for the cause of pursuing Christian mission and conversion. It is in this sense, Arvind Sharma, while subscribing to the ideal of tolerance speaks of intolerance of intolerance.

...*Tolerance of tolerance* naturally appeals to Hinduism, but it has also unwisely displayed *tolerance of intolerance*, by projecting its own internal ethos on other religions. Some of these have turned out to be *intolerant of tolerance* and have taken advantage of Hindu tolerance to undermine it. Hence I propose that, in the contemporary Indian setting, Hindus must develop *intolerance of intolerance*, and promote

tolerance outside its own religious frontier by identifying and emphasizing the elements of tolerance in other religions.¹⁰

Christian Concerns and the Mediation of Civil Society

In the last few decades, the mainline Christian Churches have become increasingly aware of the social implications of Christian faith. As a result, commitment to the liberation of the weaker sections in the society has gained sharper focus. This commitment to the downtrodden urgently calls for the mediation of the civil society. For, however highly motivated be, in the concrete situation of the country with different religious groups, the concentration on the poor and marginalized easily leads to suspicion and consequently causes serious misunderstanding in the minds of other religious groups—particularly the majority Hindu community. We need to take serious account of the fact that questions have been raised whether the Christian commitment to the upliftment of the poor or liberation has as its goal the welfare of the downtrodden, or whether it is ultimately meant for the religious purpose of conversion and numerical expansion of Christians. The Hindutva forces precisely exploit this to cause communal tension. The dalits and the tribal groups among whom the Christians are involved become the object of welfare activities (following the strategy of emulation) or targets of attack (strategy of stigmatization).¹¹ Such a situation needs to be faced concretely by the Christian community, and mere statements may not carry conviction, specially in view of the long

10 Cfr Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism for Our Times*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p. 69. By "intolerance of intolerance" the author means the intolerance of "hostile criticism of Hinduism....adopted by Christian critics of Hinduism". "The form it assumes most acutely is Hinduism's antipathy to religious conversion or what it regards as the illogic of conversion". P. 74. Space does not permit me here to go into a detailed critical discussion of this view of the author.

11 It is well-known that Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), for example, from the beginning of its emergence in 1964, has expressed itself very vehemently against what it views as inroads made by Christian missionaries among the marginalized sections of Indian society such as the tribals and dalits. It has singled out areas like North-East of the country, Gujarat, Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh, etc., where the Christian work of conversion needs to be checked. To stem this tide, VHP and other groups have, in imitation of ecclesiastical organization, have established "mission" centres of Hinduism and promotion of developmental and welfare activities among the tribals, for example. It wants to strengthen the Hindu society and the "method was to build an ecclesiastical order, complete with its own liturgy, scripture and institutional hierarchy. Diversities were to be ironed out in cultural homogeneity..." *Frontline*, Jan. 1, 1999, p. 28.

history of mission during the colonial times. Ultimately, the very cause of the poor for whom the Christian religious personnel want to involve themselves will be seriously compromised by failing to come out in the open and participate in public discussion.

II. Conditions for Involvement in the Civil Society

Where are the Roots?

The recent incidents of attack on the Churches, Christians, religious personnel—condemnable and painful though it is—is also an occasion for the Christian community for a critical self-examination about its rootedness in the soil. Rootedness is essential for the Christian community to be able to participate in the civil society, in the political, social and cultural processes taking place in the country. It is a fact that in most respects, the Christians are no different from other citizens of the country in their way of life, in their ethos, social conduct, etc. Even in the few areas like worship which bore many traces of a different cultural tradition, attempt was made to adopt indigenous elements.

But rootedness in the soil today has another dimension. I mean we should today respect also the diversity in the country characterized by different states, regions, languages, etc. This should get reflected also in the manner of the presence of Christianity. We just cannot behave as though India is a vast territory for a centrally planned Christian involvement, without respecting the uniquely distinct local and regional characteristics. For example, the presence of numerous Church personnel from the South working in the North and North-Eastern parts of the country, specially in the tribal areas has been a problem which we cannot ignore anymore, specially when the local people are left with the feeling that they are simply made into objects of religious and social work on the part of the Church-personnel from the South.

Of course, one need not be so very chauvinistic as to exclude completely personnel working in other states. What is most important, however, is that the leadership—whether in the local Church, management of institutions or religious societies—be in the hands of the local people. There are many intriguing and convenient arguments construed to prevent such a thing from happening. These need to be challenged. The local people are the best to direct the course of their religious life and are in a far better position to participate in the vicissitudes and affairs of the local civil society.

Rootedness signifies also the importance to the local language. To think and to act through my local language is my birth-right, and I need not get any one's permission for that. No authority—secular or religious—can take away this my fundamental right. And yet, is it not a fact that in several religious houses and institutes of formation the local people are forced to speak English. Local people are given the feeling that to speak in their mother-tongue is something inferior. If the liturgy is in the local language, it is frowned upon, and one prefers to look for English mass. The proliferation of English medium schools under the umbrella of the Church coupled with inattention to the language of the region, its history, culture and tradition(except some lip-service for the sake of survival!), cannot but project the image of Christianity as something Western. Not that the elites and the hard-core elements of Hindutva are all but *swadeshi*! How slavishly and with what craze they go for “foreign” is well-known and does not require comment. But the point is that when the label “foreign” is attached to the Christian community it seems to stick. And the Christian religious personnel facilitate this stigmatization by continuing with English medium schools and institutions.

Openness to Critique

Civil society is an important arena of critique on all aspects of the life of the society. Participation in civil society therefore requires readiness on the part of the various communities to be critiqued. The Christian community as a group in the larger sphere of the civil society needs to be ready today to allow itself to be critiqued in the public sphere and to be assessed by the general public. The claim to be able to judge everything unmistakably and never permit any critique cannot but be viewed as an attitude of gross arrogance. There may be areas in the life of the Christians which may not strike them but which may appear as a matter of public interest and welfare to other communities and groups. From a Christian point of view, this is nothing but a consequence of what has been termed as dialogue with the world. If, not wanting to be critiqued could be a sign of arrogance, speaking of dialogue and yet closed to critique is clearly callousness. It has no chance of being taken seriously.

Openness of Christianity to critique needs to be placed in a broader perspective and it touches upon all religious traditions.

No society can progress without mutual constructive criticism which is creative, and this very process can contribute a lot to build up strong ties of inter-relationship. Evidently, bringing into discussion in the public sphere religious issues is not to be construed as a control over or interference into the legitimate right of religious freedom. But when the religions have certain doctrines and practices which either go against human rights or causes communal tension, such issues cannot be shielded by invoking that they are of divine sanction. To concretize with an example what has been said, a particular religious group may consider the practice of female circumcision as something very sacred, and may invoke divine legitimation for it. But, if we subscribe to the principle that human beings and their dignity—and in this case women—cannot be compromised (even if purportedly there is divine legitimation), then discussion on female circumcision should necessarily become object of public discourse. No religious group needs to take offence at this.

Collaboration and Not Parallelism

A third condition for participation in the civil society concerns the principle of collaboration. It is widely recognized that the Christian community has contributed significantly in the areas of education, health-care, social-welfare, etc. Having said that, we need to realize the new demands of the changing times. These have to do not only with the material content of the Christian contribution, but more importantly, the way it is being done. I would add that the way, the mode has become no less important than the content. As it is, Christian services today exhibit a certain parallel to what is being done either by the state or other voluntary agencies. Though in principle co-operation with the larger society is recognized, in practice, however there is the attitude of self-isolation and segregation. This is fostered at various levels by confidence in money, institutional power and servile and uncritical dependence on elsewhere. There is urgent need to practice greater collaboration with the larger civil society.

There is often the fear that efficiency may suffer by collaborating with other agencies, and therefore one prefers to keep the running and management of development initiatives and welfare activities within the ecclesiastical circles. Here is where we fail to understand that incarnation means taking risks. Identification and solidarity

today calls for an openness to do *together with others*, and not excessively preoccupied whether we have all the credits. The culture of collaboration needs to be developed and this is an indispensable condition to be an active interlocutor in the civil society.

III. Issues of Civil Society

"Nation" Under Debate

"Nation-building" was the magical mantra that enchanted the people in the immediate post-independent years. Every segment of the society was invited to contribute to this common project. Now, after fifty years, we have landed on the most basic question: but, what is really meant by *nation* and what is its shape? Were we really a nation before nationalism came, or perhaps nationalism invented the nation? What does nation-building mean in a multi-ethnic and pluri-religious society?¹² Already during the struggle for Independence, there were contradictions and conflicts regarding the nature of the nation and who defines it. These questions and struggles have come out in the open following greater assertion of the marginalized peoples on the one hand and the intransigencies of the Hindutva on the other. With an essentialistic and static view of culture cast in an atavistic mould, the Hindutva nationalism is becoming "*a nationalism without nation*".¹³ The Hindutva forces take upon themselves the prerogative of defining the nation. But the real nation is in the state of being consolidated and it is made up of plurality of cultures, religious traditions and histories. Besides, there is the question of people and groups who are economically and socially underprivileged. They are no less committed to the nation. However, their conception of nation and nationalism is different from that of the Hindutva nationalism of fascist kind.

A nation is not an abstract entity; it is a matter of people who *together* create the nation by becoming conscious of their unity, developing common symbols and interacting among themselves

12 Cfr D.L.Sheth, "Nation-building in Multi-Ethnic Societies. The Experience of South Asian", in Ramkant/B.C.Upreti(eds), *Nation-building in South Asia*. Vol. 1, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1991, pp.13-26; cfr also T.K. Oommen, *State and Society in India. Studies in Nation-building*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1990; Zoya Hasan et al. (Eds), *The State, Political Process and Identity. Reflection on Modern India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1989.

13 Cfr G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997.

regarding cultural, economic and social issues. We understand in this context, how important is the role of civil society for the existence of the nation and its life, particularly in these critical times. When the role of the civil society fails, then nationalism gets identified with state or hegemonic forces like the Hindutva. Those who fail to step into the vast arena of civil society have no right to lament about Hindutva, for through their indifference and lethargy they allow it to rule the roosts.

As for Christians, no serious minded person will accept the repeated accusation of the Hindutva that Christians are an anti-national force. On the other hand, Christianity has yet to become a serious interlocutor in civil society regarding the shaping of the nation and its future destiny. The insular mentality and isolationism cannot but raise questions about Christian commitment to the issues of the public sphere, to the political, social and cultural processes in the country. It is not rare to find Christian religious personnel who not even care to exercise their voting right in the various elections in the polity. On the other hand, their keen involvement in the internal affairs of their own religious orders, the voting in their provincial and general chapters, etc., occupy all the space of their consciousness, that they forget that they are first and foremost people of this soil and that they have to act and interact as responsible citizens of this country.

The continued lack of openness to the broader issues of the civil society will, unfortunately, lend substance to some of the accusations. The unique feature of our country is that, for one Hindu who is communalist, there are thousand Hindus who will challenge him or her in the name of secularism, pluralism and tolerance. The best course for Christianity in this country is not aloofness but continuous negotiation of relationship in the sphere of the civil society. It is an important way to contribute to the consolidation of the nation.

Democratization—the Linchpin

Democratization of any society takes place to the extent that freedom as enablement of the people is realized and equality as the basis for wholesome inter-relationship among the various groups takes root. Civil society is an indispensable space for true democratization, since it is the favourable ground for the realization of freedom as well as equality. Serious problems crop up when

any one particular force in the society wants to monopolize the civil space meant for all. And this is precisely what happens with the Hindutva. Its hegemonic occupation of the civil space is a great threat to the democratization of the society. Very instructive is the analysis of Neera Chandhoke in this regard:

This [Hindutva] ideology is anti-democratic in every fundamental sense. It attempts to stifle Muslim aspirations and by implication, the aspirations of other religious minorities to be free and equal citizens of India. It is anti-democratic because it denies Hindus the right to be the kind of Hindus they want to be. It is fascist not only because communal, but because it attempts to pulverize all those intermediate institutions which can act as buffers for the individual. Hindutva thus threatens all liberal institutions, above all that of civil society.¹⁴

Any critique on the part of the Christians as a religious force against the Hindutva may not be as effective as when it is identified as an anti-democratic element that goes against the very spirit of tolerance, dialogue and mutuality called for by the ideal of civil society. Christians themselves need to be on guard that they do not counter a fascist and fundamentalist force by turning themselves into Christian fundamentalists. As is well-known, one fundamentalism is not solved by raising another fundamentalism. Any fundamentalist tendency on the part of the Christian community—even in reacting to the Hindutva—could make them (Christians) no less anti-democratic.

The Subalterns - New Focus to Civil Society

No society can really progress if it excludes its weaker ones—the large number of oppressed and subordinated peoples. That is why what concerns them ought to become a focal point in any civil society. It is the common responsibility of all citizens, and this cannot be simply delegated to the state. The subalterns are represented in the civil space by the various movements for their respective cause. As Manoranjan Mohanty rightly observes, these movements are not to be viewed as disrupting the society, but rather “as expanding efforts for the creative transformation of society. These social movements seek to alter the prevailing structure of

14 Neera Chandhoke, *Op.cit.*p.242.

power, project values of justice, equality and freedom adding new dimension to them".¹⁵

It is well-known that Christianity, both in the past history of the country as well as in the present times, has found much echo among the depressed castes and classes resulting specially in mass conversions of dalits and tribals. The self-confidence these groups have acquired through literacy and education, have, obviously, predisposed them to critically question the oppression of various kinds to which they were subjected for centuries. Naturally, this has brought down on them the anger of all those forces who feel threatened by the rise of the marginalized and its consequence for the established order of things. No wonder then, that dalit and tribal Christians have become the target of violent attacks.

It is amusing to note in this context the curious comment of Ashok Singhal, the leader of Vishwa Hindu Parishad about the intention in conferring Nobel Prize on Amartya Sen. For him—as it was reported—it is a Christian conspiracy!¹⁶ The very fact that Sen insistently spoke about the importance of health-care, literacy and social security to the large masses of the people whose concerns have not been attended, was reason enough to view him as supporting the cause of Christianity and its expansion.

It is easy to see that ultimately what perturbs the Hindutva forces is the threat posed to the hegemony of upper castes and classes in the society. Violent opposition to any destabilization and insecurity, no matter from which quarter it comes from, has been the logic of all hegemonic powers. It is interesting to note that at the height of colonialism in India, the British aristocrats were worried about the danger and liability represented by missionaries hailing from the lower classes of England to the stability of the social order in India with its consequences for their smooth governance. Referring to Sydney Smith, Duncan Forrester notes:

Smith very accurately represented the fears of moderate and aristocratic English opinion at the dangerous social, religious and political consequences of allowing men from

¹⁵ Manoranjan Mohanty, "Social Movements in Creative Society: Of Autonomy and Interconnection", in M. Mohanty et al. (Eds), *People's Rights: Social Movements and the State in the Third World*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1998, p.65-66.

¹⁶ *Indian Express*, Dec.28, 1998.

the lower ranks of society deeply infected with radical, eccentric, and Jacobin views to attempt to propagate the Gospel in India. He was correct in believing that the egalitarian orientation which they had developed as a result of their resentment at the restraints of class in England would predispose them to question the social order in India, although less right in regarding as politically seditious to British rule in India.¹⁷

The present-day circumstances indicate that Christianity may not serve the cause of the oppressed by posing itself as the patron of the oppressed groups. A wiser course for Christianity would be to bring to the public awareness, the cause of the most disprivileged ones. Fighting against the Hindutva in the name of another religion—Christianity—is only to fall into the trap of the Hindutva to divert the focus from the cause of the marginalized. In other words, the type of Christianity that is immersed in ritualism, triumphal manifestations, in celebration of anniversaries, centenaries and jubilees, or the ones involved in raising huge cathedrals and impressive concrete structures, is not the one that will be able to challenge the threat of Hindutva to the subalterns. Because in a multi-religious situation, the association of the depressed classes with a particular religious group (specially if it shows signs of triumphalism, money and power) is bound to create communal tensions. The contribution of Christianity at this moment will depend upon the extent it is able to push the cause of the oppressed groups as the common agenda in the civil society and the most important priority of the nation. If it tries to associate the depressed classes and groups only with its *religious identity*, it will neither contribute to the long-term good of the depressed classes nor to that of Christian commitment. In other words, the Christian approach to the subalterns need to be such that their cause becomes common cause of the entire society; that it becomes a moral challenge to all the segments of the society.

17 Duncan B. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity. Attitudes of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India*, Curzon Press, London, 1980, p.194; cfr also G.S. Oddie, *Social Protest in India. British Protestant Missionaries and Social Reform*, Manohar, Delhi, 1979. As for the attitude and policies of Hindu rulers, the Japanese scholar has shown a more complex kind of relationship with a case study of the Travancore state. Cfr Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State. Travancore 1858-1936*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

Challenging the Dominant Model of Development

With the state and the market forces in collusion to promote a particular model of development, what has happened is widespread exclusion. Contrary to the general impression, the process of globalization is in fact a process of progressive exclusion.¹⁸ Development and economy are not matters on which experts can pontificate. These realities impinge upon the everyday life of the people, and therefore the model of development and economic policies are to become object of common discussion and debate in the public sphere.¹⁹

Christian community can play a role in critically evaluating the present model of development and the current orientation of economy. The critique acquires substance when it is coupled with the practice of solidarity—solidarity with the working class, with the unorganized labourers, peasants and others whose survival is threatened. It is the association and solidarity with the concerns of the most neglected segments of the society that will enable the Christian community to exercise a critical role in the civil society in terms of economic policies. Preaching simply ethical principles on economy from a high pedestal without caring to substantiate its critique with solidarity and identification with the affected groups is to risk not being listened to or not being taken seriously in the public sphere.

Ethics and Human Rights

Participation of various groups and interests in the space of the civil society needs to address the issue of developing certain ethical perspectives. Without it, the civil society will really be lacking in closer bonds and higher ideals. However, no one group may impose its own ethical ways deriving from its particular religious or ideological loyalties. But there is room for meeting of various ethical insights of people from different backgrounds, distinct communities with competing values and divergent interests and choices. A very important point of reference in this process is the set of universal human rights.

We know that many a human right remains dead-letter for want of political will to put it into practice. Civil society can function

18 Cfr Felix Wilfred (ed) , *Globalization or Peripheralization?* Special issue of *Jeevadhara*, January, 1995.

19 Cfr C.T. Kurien, *Rethinking Economics. Reflections Based on a Study of the Indian Economy*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1996.

as an important forum to facilitate the enforcement of human rights in our society. Particularly we need to single out the right to basic education, right to primary health and social security. These are some of the areas in which there has been gross neglect. Amartya Sen has repeatedly insisted on these rights.²⁰ Is it not an important task of Christianity today to bring into the discussion of the public sphere the issues of basic education and primary health? Here the Christian institutions are very vulnerable. With such immense resources and personnel, the Church would be expected to contribute massively to this project. "Where your treasure is, there is your heart" (Mt 6:21). Is it possible for the Church to say that its heart is with basic education and primary health? Does not really the treasure (also literally!) and heart of many religious congregations, for example, lie in the profit-bringing English medium schools and institutions of higher education? If the Church does not become an avantgarde in the civil society to bring to the general awareness the human right to basic education and health, it would be failing to realize the implications of the Gospel as well as wanting in its commitment to the real welfare of the country, which lies with those worse off in the society

IV. Some Proposals

As I noted earlier, one important reason why the Church has not become an active interlocutor in the civil society, despite the manifest intention of opening up to the broader context, is because *structurally* it is not disposed towards this goal. A clear case is the manner in which the Church-related institutions—schools, social welfare centres, hospitals are run. I would propose that wherever the Church establishes any such institution, it should be made a point that the *ownership* of the institution rest with the local community and that it be run by the local community which may comprise people of different background, religious affiliation, etc. Even more, any such institution should spring up in dialogue and consultation with the local people responding to their real needs and not to those imagined by somebody else. The modalities of this should be worked out in the concrete.

20 Cfr Tapas Majumdar, "Amartya Sen in search of Impure Welfare Economics. Finding New Space" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Nov.7, 1998, pp.2860-2862; Prabhat Patnaik, "Amartya Sen and the Theory of Public Action" *ibid.* Pp.2855-2859.

The ownership by the people is not against any Christian principle; on the contrary, it reflects some of the central values of the Gospel. Nor is it something difficult to practice, provided there is real conviction and will. That is the crux of the question. Often, the power of the clergy and the religious is so very much bound up with these institutions, that they will find it extremely hard to part with the ownership. But here is the acid test of the Church being truly a *servant* to the people, and not their master. Is it not a clear *sign of the place* that today any Church-initiated institution for the welfare of the people be owned by the whole community? Apart from creating a sense of belonging in the minds and hearts of the local people, a practice of this kind will give opportunity to the Church to be a serious interlocutor in the civil society. Secondly, such an effort will send a different signal to the general public, not few of whom have seen in these institutions a manifestation of power and money rather than service. Finally, the ownership of Church-initiated institutions will have a cathartic or purificatory effect on its clergy and religious, and will lead to their renewal in the spirit of the Gospel.

2. Participation in the civil society calls also for ways and means by which the Church could listen to the heart-beat of the nation and participate in the establishment run by the government and other agencies for the welfare of the people. As it is, we have concentration of Christian religious personnel in the Church-run institutions, which, as I said, structurally contributes to the isolation of Christian community. A radical change is required here. I propose that more and more religious personnel do their service as *committed citizens* in various fields—educational, medical, social welfare, etc.—in institutions run by the state and other agencies. This will bring greater integration of Christianity with the life-stream of the people and of the country.

3. The catechetical and formation-programmes for Christians and for the ministers and the religious should be such that they enable them to forge relationships with the civil society and with the peoples of other faiths. Though much is talked about the relationship with other religious traditions, when it comes to pastoral practice, we have a situation in which most pastors are not ready to educate the people and orientate the community in the spirit of dialogue, with the result that these Christian communities continue with the same kind of prejudices and cliché images of bygone times.

4. Finally, at various levels in the Church, there should be *commissions or cells for public affairs*. Their role is not simply to give *ad hoc* responses in times of crisis, but a sustained work of facilitating Christian involvement and dialogue with the civil society. The commission or cell will also pursue study and research on the social, political and cultural processes in the country, and seek to relate the Christian community with such process.

Conclusion

The deplorable incidents against the Christian community has to be placed against the agenda of the Hindutva forces. Hindutva today tries to occupy all the space in the name of a hegemonic ideology leaving no room for other constituents in the polity. In marked contrast, we have, on the other pole, the Christian community which in general, can be characterized as conducting an existence of *withdrawal* from the public space. It is an enclosed space of isolation and security of institutions. Now that, this very space of security into which Christianity had withdrawn has been threatened by the violent encroachment of the Hindutva activists, this should serve as an occasion for the Christian community to come out in the open and interact with the larger civil society and its various constituents in the spirit of dialogue, mutuality and tolerance. This dialogue cannot be sporadic, but should be a sustained one.

The recent incidents are not simply an attack on a religious community and desecration of its holy sites. Its real ethical genre is one of *violation of human rights*. This offers a broader perspective to the whole issue. Only a community that is formed in the general culture of human rights and is sensitive to its infringement, no matter where or to whom it happens, is also in a position to invoke credibly the violation of human rights in its own case. A forum where commitment to the cause of human rights can be cultivated is that of civil society. Wholehearted and total commitment (and not partial and selective) will make other partners in the civil society to raise their voice when there is human rights violation against the Christian community.

Within Christianity itself there is a wide spectrum of denominations, views and orientations. That tells also about the different grades of ability to come to terms with the Hindutva. Which type of Christianity is today in the best position to really challenge the Hindutva forces? To my mind, it is not a Christianity which finds

its identity simply in religious practices, institutions and manifestation of power and money. Such a Christianity locked in confrontation with the Hindutva will only add to the mayhem caused by communal troubles and violence. A Christianity that wants to simply strengthen its religious identity and specificity and not committed to dialogue in the open sphere, could be easily infected by communalist and fundamentalist trends that is anti-civil society and anti-democratic. The type of Christianity that is conscious of the social and political implications of the Gospel and is committed to the transformation of society, to the emancipation of the lowest, transcending particular loyalties, and is in continuous dialogue with the civil society on all such issues, will be also the one which can effectively challenge the Hindutva. For, in this case, the challenge is not in the name of a particular religious identity, but in the name of basic issues affecting the life of the whole community, nation and humanity.

Chennai,

26 January, Republic Day

Book Reviews

G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997 (Paperback, 1998), pp.xii+265.

The book under review *Nationalism without a Nation in India* by G. Aloysius, a research scholar of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, was published in the Golden jubilee year of Indian independence. It is a very timely and indeed thought-provoking book. It has been warmly welcomed as a scholarly and interesting reading for historians, political scientists and sociologists. It contains 'a sociological interpretation of modern Indian history' and helps understand the current political situation in the subcontinent. Its newness consists in the departure from traditional nationalist historiography by making a strong critique of the Indian national movement, going even beyond the position of subaltern historians. The study begins with sociological perspectives on nationalism and applies them onto modern Indian history in order to chart the future. The underlying concern of the work is to highlight the role of the subalterns, the underdogs of Indian history, in attaining independence, and, assert their due place on the politico-economical map of a potential 'nation'.

The immediate focus of the book is the colonial rule, a period of Indian history looked at variously by historians of different orientations: the Cambridge, Subaltern and the Regionalist. It is Aloysius' contention that none of these orientations have pictured the scene from the perspective of the subjugated masses as pitted against a dominant elite. He juxtaposes the two groups that were active on the subcontinent and shows how the dreams and aspirations of one has been subsumed by the other. It was a manoeuvred plot in the name of getting rid of a third enemy—the British imperialism—but aimed against the internal resurgence of the masses with aspirations to re-order society. The much acclaimed nationalist upsurge against the colonial impact to outdo and overthrow imperialism/colonialism when placed against the backdrop of a subcontinental and civilizational magnitude unveils some ugly warts.

The argument consistently and elaborately developed, as the crux of the research project, is to establish that 'nationalism' has failed to construct the 'nation' in India. The assumption 'nationalism paves the way to nation building' is critically analysed drawing on the data provided by the different histories. It breaks the myth of the 'nationalist movement' created by a 'monolithic, un-contextualised and rarefied reading of Indian response to British rule' and looks at the colonial period of Indian history

through 'a spectrum of categories: nation, nationalism and nationalities (p.6-7).

Nationalism may refer to the 'doctrine or ideology of an aspiring class....or to a socio-political movement for state-formation'(p.10). Whether as an ideology or as a movement, it could be applied to a state, or, to one or more ethnic communities. Thus both 'nation, and 'nationalism', have at heart a lot to do with 'ethnicity turning political', where ethnicity is marked by cultural homogeneity. It is assumed, even by Aloysius, that the legitimacy of Indian nation-state consists in preserving this pan-Indian cultural bond.

The book is divided into seven Chapters including the Introduction in which the theoretical framework of the research is specified. He makes a breakthrough in viewing nationalism and nation from a sociological angle thus making inroads into the preserve of the historian and political scientist. His sociological interpretative key is that 'the internal cleavages within Indian society, rather than the obvious external contradiction between Indians and the British, were responsible for the outcome of the nationalist movement and the failure of the nation to emerge'(p.18).

The insights and observations from 'both the new critique of modern Indian historiography as well as sociology of nationalism' are put to effective use in analyzing the colonial period in which the three protagonists are: the British imperialists (colonialism), the Cultural nationalists (of the elite, dominant pro-Brahminic groups) and the political nationalists (of the sub-altern, dominated, anti-Brahminic groups).

The second Chapter analyzes the colonial period from the point of view of power relations brought about by the restructuring of the interaction between traditional Indian society, on the one hand and colonial rule on the other. It is accomplished first by addressing the impact of the British on the traditional Indian society, second by checking the extent to which colonial rule helped shape a modern society 'based on social mobility and anonymity of membership', and third, by looking into the contribution of infra-structural innovations towards the rise of political consciousness and articulation of nationalist thoughts and sentiments. Summarising the assessment Aloysius says: "the impact of colonialism was to avert the social progress, economic diversification and emergence of culture-based politics, and revert to an environment and climate of pan-Indian Brahminical feudal consolidation.."(p.51).

In the third Chapter entitled, "Nationalism : Homogenization of Power within Culture" a closer and in-depth look at the texture of colonial India from 'the underside' is attempted. It surveys and analyzes the various struggles—anti-caste, anti-feudal and pro-autonomy—which wanted to create a national society. A society characterized by homogenization of power. These numerous struggles are pitted against the British rule on the one side and traditional custodians of power on the other. Aloysius poignantly establishes that the pressure put on British rule to support the cause

of the emerging peoples turned out to be 'the initial steps towards dismantling of the colonial order'(p.91). These 'scattered struggles toward social democracy could not transform themselves into a pan-Indian form' because of (among other things) "the antagonistic pan-Indianism of the [elite]nationalists towards this process of internal democratization articulated from a traditional as well as colonially empowered social position"(p.92). It is his contention that this social democratization process was indeed a political awakening as to deserve the name of 'political nationalism', differing from the dominant or elite nationalists approach called 'cultural nationalism'.

The fourth Chapter assesses the emergence and growth of the nationalistic movement highlighting the "dichotomous notion of Indian political response to colonial rule". It takes a second look at what are ordinarily labeled as the 'national' and 'communal' movements. It is shown how the cultural nationalist concerns were primarily 'to invest power from the alien culture and reinvest it in one's own' rather than promoting the efforts to becoming a modern nation through a homogenous spread of power over culture. Nationalist movement is depicted as a plank on which the synchronization of the upper crust of Indian society took place against the colonial rule but at the same time directed to thwart the efforts of social democratization attempted by the political nationalists with the aid of the British. Nationalism thus has a history not only of being anti-imperialist but also anti-subaltern.

In the fifth Chapter the above mentioned cleavage within the Indian society is focused upon from an ideological perspective. The socio-political situation, conflicting as it was, cannot be termed monolithic, as it is usually done. The division within the country of the cultural elites and the political subalterns along with their ideological differences is brought out better in this Chapter. In the words of Aloysius, "nationalism as an intellectual-cultural construct, too, was diversified within the subcontinent...construction of the past was differential, the contestation at present was polarized and the visions of the future were divergent". Commenting on the efforts to invent a tradition, he continues, "the political nationalists saw themselves as heir to another tradition of the subcontinent's history—that of resistance, heterodoxy, protest, and egalitarianism"(p.19).

The sixth Chapter takes a critical look at the Gandhian phase of nationalist movement which succeeded in its effort to synchronise the diverse movements within Indian society on the anti-imperialist plank. It makes an incisive assessment and squarely blames the elite (cultural nationalists) with whom Gandhi colluded, for having prevented the emergence of a 'nation' (the project of the political nationalists) by allowing a division of the subcontinent as well as making all types of minorities and marginalized feel insecure.

In the final Chapter an attempt is made to place theoretically the development enumerated earlier under the scheme of Gramscian categories. The two diverging nationalisms witnessed within Indian subcontinent are

classified under 'national popular' and 'hegemony' categories. Gramscian notion of hegemony (a conscious and consensual political process for all parties involved) is one in which a class or group attains or preserves dominance by conceding the economic and political aspirations of the masses. Unlike the prediction of Gramsci, in the Indian subcontinent, the cultural nationalists sought to 'move the masses away from economic and political pursuits by delegitimizing them as imitations of the West' and brought about a type of national unity based on 'religious and allied notions' thus preserving the status quo in economic and political matters (p.223). In this failure Aloysius indicts Gandhi gravely because it was the Gandhian mobilization of nationalism that succeeded to submerge the interests of the political nationalists (Chapter VI).

Lastly, it can legitimately be said that the author amply succeeds to push forward the cause of the submerged in Indian polity beyond a point it has been taken to by the subaltern study group. 'The subalternist explanation of the situation that Indian bourgeoisie failed to speak for the nation is too general and insufficient.' Another contribution of the work is to re-establish the validity of the Ambedkarian critique of the (cultural) nationalist project, that 'the modern colonial drama, in more sense than usually conceded is a continuity with the past' (p.227). While the dominance of cultural nationalists won independence, it is to be seen whether there can be continuation of the present polity as a modern nation without the re-emergence of political nationalists on the political and economic scene. The present day politics is a vindication of the fact that while we have plenty of 'nationalism' the 'nation' is yet to be!

Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State, Travancore 1858-1936*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.xi+252.

Koji Kawashima did research for the present book under the guidance of Professor David Arnold, a member of the Subaltern Studies Group. This fact helps one immediately place the work in perspective. Subaltern studies attempt re-reading the history of South Asian peoples from their own perspective. It is an 'underside-history', of the masses, the peasants, the depressed classes. In this work, Koji Kawashima of Kokushikan university, Tokyo, makes a study of the relationship between a 'Hindu State, Missionaries and British Colonial rule' with a subaltern concern. He has limited himself to the socio-political and religious aspects of the relationship, as he acknowledges, not because the economic is unimportant, but rather because it has already been studied.

The author has chosen the last phase of colonial rule—latter half of nineteenth century and early decades of twentieth century—as the period of study. The place he has focused on is the Travancore State, in the southernmost tip of Indian subcontinent. Travancore was a Hindu State in which the "King derived legitimacy to rule from god-Padmanabha", the presiding deity of the Kingdom. Geographically it consisted of the

southernmost part of the present Kerala State along with present day Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. It had 15% of the people speaking Tamil and the rest Malayalam. The author focuses on this period as it gives indications of steps on the part of the Hindu State to modernize itself. The reforms and policies taken under Dewanship of Sir T. Madhava Rao (1858-1872) marks the beginning of transition.

Koji Kawashima succeeds to show, how "during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a self-declared Hindu State changed itself into a modern state; how the state used Christian missionaries, who had a completely different religious position from itself, during the process of State-building; and how the British authorities were concerned in this process" (p.1). In other words, how the ideology that held a people together shifted from 'Kingship' to 'Democracy' and how structures were adjusted to enable the polity shift from a 'Hindu Kingdom' to become part of a 'nation-state'.

Colonialism held its stranglehold over Indian subcontinent even at the height of its glory in two ways; one through 'direct rule' (under direct British administration) and the other through 'indirect rule' (the princely states that had regents of the British empire to monitor and execute its wishes). Nearly two fifths of the Indian subcontinent was ruled indirectly with the assistance of over five hundred princes. This latter arrangement was advantageous to the British as it turned out to be more economical (with less British servants to be paid from the exchequer), and had fewer nationalistic upsurges. Though there are many studies on princely states under British rule, in the wake of subaltern studies impetus, the present work is refreshing. It provides a new opening to the socio-political and religious life of the people thereby rewriting the prevalent portrayal of the princes as 'corrupt', 'incompetent' and at best 'subservient' to the British.

Koji begins the study with the premise that a Hindu state had a legitimacy to rule over the people, i.e., a religious sanction which the British lacked (or, failed in their attempt to usurp). The approaches of the Hindu state (Travancore) to modernization and state-building can be seen as an alternative path to history of modernity in India. Therefore, how the princely state encountered, utilized and resisted imperialism through westernization and modernization is what Kawashima attempts in his study. To quote him, "the nature of the state is investigated through its interaction with Christian missionaries, largely because its character can be more clearly seen in relation to institutions which vigorously propagated a completely different religion" (p.6). It helps us see how the ideas of a Hindu state were modified or reworked to accommodate even an alien religion.

The author is spurred on to study the transition in the Hindu state, by bringing in the missionaries, to counter and corroborate certain arguments put forward by earlier studies, especially of Robin Jeffrey in *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908*. There

have been claims that Travancore was a static society for about 700 years; that the missionaries challenged the State in order to bring privileges to the lower sections (castes); that the British wanted to modernize and were pressurising the Hindu states. In response, Koji Kawashima counters all three assumptions: first, as subaltern studies have revealed, even before 1800 "Indian villages were influenced by development of commercialization and...were in competition for a higher status"(p.7); second, though the British had ideas of modernization, increasingly from the second half of 19th century they left the Hindu state to itself; and third, "despite their evident religious differences, the missionaries and the Hindu state were not always confrontational", nor did the "British authorities" contrary to expectation, "always support the missionaries" (p.219). Countering these and other prevalent notions seem to be a subtle motivating factor for Kawashima's research.

The development of the theme in the six chapters of the book are as follows: In the first, he examines the nature of the Hindu state, its effort to maintain legitimacy by modernizing itself into a model state. In the second Chapter he investigates the relationship between Christian missionaries and the British authorities, with special attention being given to the shift in the stand of British authorities on religious and social matters ever since late nineteenth century. In the third Chapter and the fourth the author examines the development of education and medicine in Travancore especially as case studies of both modernization and mission-state relations. He highlights that both parties co-operated in these matters despite differences in their religious positions. In Chapter five, government policy towards the lower castes is taken into investigation to show that the state was concerned about the movements of the lower castes for two main reasons: one, to prevent conversion, and the other to maintain the social and economic order which the lower castes had supported largely as agricultural labourers. He also shows that the missionaries were helpful to the state in achieving this aim. In the final chapter, the missionary activities in Cochin state and its implications in that State are studied by way of comparing and contrasting with similar developments in Travancore.

It is a timely book at a time when missionary activity is once again a matter of public debate. The education and health-care of missionaries helped lower sections and communities to avail of 'modernity' which was also to be the lot of the higher groups, thus bringing both within one myth—the myth of modern nation-state.

George Thadathil